FIVE HUNDRED MILES TO FLIGHT by Jeffery Harrison

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

Incorporating FIELD SPORTS

SEVENTY-SIXTH YEAR | FRIDAY, MARCH 14th, 1958 | 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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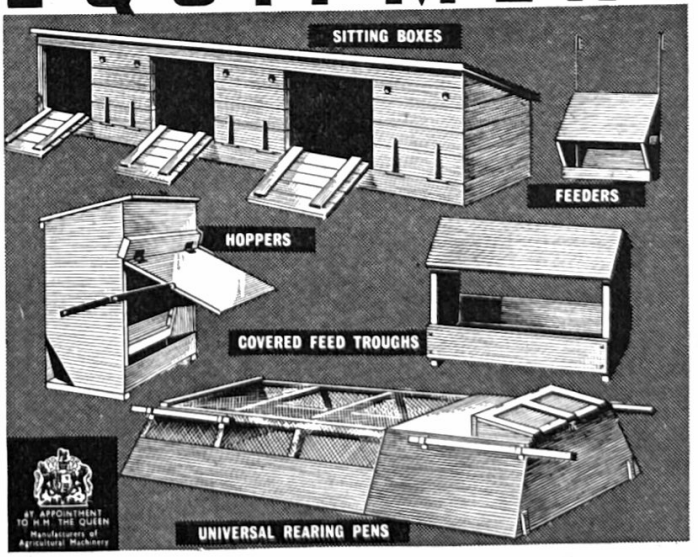

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HYDRO-ELECTRICS AND FISHERIES

THE North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board's Annual Report for 1957 contains the following reference to the fishery activities of the Board.

During the year the Board have had occasion to draw public attention to the depradations to their trout fishing stocks by poachers who not only avoid paying the small token permit fees required, but also endanger the efforts being made to develop a great tourist industry and bring material benefit to the economy of the country. The state of the law affecting poaching for trout especially at stocked lochs and reservoirs has been drawn to the attention of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

On November 15 a report on the passage of smolts and kelts through fish passes was published by the Scottish Home Department.

The Salmon Research Committee arranged for the investigation to be carried out by a sub-committee of their members. In submitting their report, the sub-committee emphasised the provisional nature of the conclusions reached and the incompleteness of the evidence considered. It is satisfactory, however, to find amongst their conclusions about smolts the following statement:

"On the limited evidence available to us the number of smolts injured in passing through the turbines is probably negligible."

The committee was impressed by the care with which the arrangements at the other dams for excluding smolts from the turbines have been designed.

As regards kelts, the committee found that while a portion of them may now descend later than formerly, this is not necessarily due to any defect in the fish passes and that, owing to their small value in the total stock of salmon, there is a limit to the expenditure which should be applied at fish passes for the improvement of conditions for the descent of kelts.

In 1957 the fishing season was noteworthy for the bad run of spring salmon on the east coast of Scotland generally. This was partly compensated for by a good summer run from June to August. In 1956 the autumn run had been very much better than for many years but in 1957 autumn fish were once again very scarce. On the other hand the run of grilse was extremely good although it did not reach Pitlochry. This general experience was reflected in the number of fish ascending the passes at the Board's works. The increase in numbers recorded and particularly of grilse indicates that satisfactory numbers of smolts must have succeeded in passing the Board's dams and other works in recent seasons. Although sea trout were exceptionally plentiful, they are not of importance at any of the Board's works except those at Morar. Prolonged easterly winds were not favourable for brown trout angling during the later spring months.

Research into the respective productivity of salmon which spawn naturally and of those whose ova are incubated in a hatchery and also into the homing of the fish and related problems began at traps operated below the Meig and Loch Luichart dams. At the Meig trap 13,944 smolts were counted, and of these 2,700 were marked.

THE SHOOTING TIMES AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE
Incorporating FIELD SPORTS
Official Organ of THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3940 FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 1958 Founded 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Airguns in Scotland

In the House of Commons recently the Secretary of State for Scotland was asked whether he would consider the introduction of legislation to prohibit young persons under the age of 16 years from being in possession of airguns and what evidence he had received regarding danger to the public caused by persons under the age of 16 years using airguns, which might call for an amendment of existing law.

Mr. John Maclay, in a written reply, said that he had received very few representations about the possession or use of airguns by young persons and had no evidence to suggest that legislation on the subject was necessary.

Of Mice and Mallard

A horde of lowly meadow mice, swarming over fields and stripping them of foodstuffs planted for duck and geese, has forced thousands of wildfowl to hasten their migrational flight, reports the American Wildlife Management Institute.

It happened last autumn in the Klamath Basin, the famous wildfowl crossroads of the West that straddles the Oregon-California boundary. The tremendous build-up of field mice is causing concern among public health authorities as well as farmers and conservationists.

The Oregon State Game Commission says that "what grain the mice have not eaten, they have buried for their winter stores," and they have perforated ditch banks making water control difficult.

The mice appear to be increasing despite concentrated applications of poisons, and economic losses, at the last report, exceeded five million dollars. Ironically, many disappointed wildfowlers are said to have "blasted away" at the large number of hawks and owls that were attracted by the army of mice.

American Firearms Regulations

The free and easy attitude to firearms in America is further emphasised by new regulations relating to interstate traffic in firearms and ammunition issued by the Internal Revenue Service. These are the approved version of revisions proposed last year by the Service's Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division.

The original proposal was criticised vigorously by sportsmen, target shooters, arms dealers and manufacturers, and members of Congress. Drawing most criticism were four requirements — that all purchasers of firearms and of pistol and revolver ammunition acknowledge receipt in writing; that manufacturers stamp serial numbers on all arms produced; and that the dealers and manufacturers maintain their business records permanently.

The public viewed the personal signature requirement as a form of firearms registration and hence an infringement on individual rights. The permanent storing of firearms and ammunition records plus the serial numbering of the arms presently not being so marked was viewed as an obstruction to business that would raise manufacturing and handling costs and result in increased prices.

The Internal Revenue Service has yielded on each point. Signatures will not be required. Manufacturers will continue to produce .22 calibre rifles and shotguns without serial numbers, and business records must be kept for 10 years.

New Trap-Shooting Cartridge

I understand from Dr. R. A. Denham, whose article on clay shooting under Olympic conditions appears on page 219, that results obtained with the new type of Alphamax cartridge were good. It seemed to burn very quickly; faster than anything many had used before. If it is satisfactory it will certainly be used in the European Championships in Geneva this year.

At least four shooters are now making arrangements to go to the World Championships in Moscow. It will be interesting to see if enough ammunition will be made available for them to get used to British products or whether, as in the Melbourne Olympics and the 1957 European Championships, they will have to rely on foreign enterprise.

Gun Auction

It is apparent that the demand for good secondhand shotguns exceeds the supply. At Messrs. Knight, Frank and Rutley's sale on March 5, every gun was keenly competed for and although, obviously, prices depended on the age and condition of the weapons, the following prices paid give an idea of market trends.

12-bore hammerless ejector gun by Charles Lancaster.	£50
16-bore hammerless ejector gun by Cogswell and Harrison.	£68
12-bore hammerless ejector gun by Purdey.	£215
A pair of 12-bore hammerless guns by Buzard.	£105
12-bore hammerless gun by Holland and Holland.	£100
12-bore by Purdey	£130
Pair of 12-bore guns by W. R. Leeson.	£120

In addition to these there was a large variety of guns ranging from £40 to £70.

AUCEPS.

A roomy hide built within range of a favourite settling tree.

On a March Afternoon

by Tower-Bird

YOU cannot ever be quite certain about pigeon. Often enough, you cannot even be fairly sure. On the first day of March we took nearly a hundred cartridges with us to a roosting wood, and fired (as authorised persons) two of them at cormorants on their way home to the coast ; two at carrion crows ; one at a rook which I mistook for a crow (since it was almost too late for a rook to be out, and we hoped to kill a crow or two at deepening dusk) ; two at pigeon.

As we were parking the car near the wood at 2 o'clock a flock of about three hundred pigeon flew up into some trees, and, as we left the spot on foot, drifted down again to their feeding. A good sign, but evidently they went to roost elsewhere. There was a certain amount of intermittent "popping," mainly in the distance, round about dusk, but this last day of "organised" pigeon shoots, like so many other Saturdays of its kind hereabouts, must be marked up as a failure. We have plenty of pigeon over a wide area, plenty of roosting woods, but poor organisation, few guns, and far and away too many stay-at-home farmers who could not care less, it seems, about the depredation of pigeon, though they moan loudly enough at meetings and through the Press.

The attitude of the majority of farmers towards the pigeon problem is very similar to their pre-myxomatosis attitude towards the rabbit. "Let us not allow even the most trustworthy men to take or shoot the crop-damaging vermin on our lands, this stricture to include our own farm-workers. But let us moan like a stricken bull about the harm done to our crops and pockets." I imagine the answer lies in the word "Subsidies."

Ecstacy of Courtship and Migration

This afternoon of March 1, 1958, was, however, far from a wasted one. We were able to watch well over a thousand wigeon and five other species of duck—mallard, shoveler, pintail, pochard, and teal—really enjoying their noisy selves on grey pools of flood-water close by. Even at the report of a gun, they did little more than rise, fly round for a minute or two, and then settle again. All afternoon and evening the wigeon kept up a continuous and almost monotonous calling *wheeoo-woodit-wheeoo-woodit-wheeoo-woodit*. There was no sunshine during the day, though it only began to get chilly at dusk, but the excitement of approaching migrating, and or courtship had a strong hold over those whistling companies of wigeon. They played on the water in pairs and they rose in pairs, but when a big lot left the water or ground (for many were feeding on the damp, sweet grass well away from the pools) they joined up, racing this way and that as we have seen them throughout the winter.

Enter the Harrier

One interesting incident occurred during late afternoon. I was standing in cover, admiring the silver buds of palm all round me, when I heard a sound like a mighty wave crashing along a shingle-beach. I thought at first that it was a great lot of Canadas settling on, or leaving the water a few hundred yards away. I heard the wigeon calling now with far more energy and noise, and with different notes. I thought that the geese had excited them even more than the frenzy of mating and migration. Then, through the lacework of birches, I saw a bird approaching at no height at all, and it came slowly right over me—a Montagu harrier, and the first I have seen since the winter of 1957, when one hovered, almost like a kestrel, very, very close to me as I sat under camouflage netting in a mud-gutter at Pagham Harbour. It surprised me that the harrier should have caused so much turmoil and even panic among the wigeon, for the roar of the mighty wave I had heard had only been the birds hurriedly leaving the floodwater. This I learned from my companion who was in a position to see the whole affair.

There was an old duck mallard whose loud quacking was of quite a different tone to the rest that afternoon. She had laryngitis, I fancy ! "Is that a mallard ?" asked my companion. "It is," I replied, "though I admit it sounds more like a *Moss*covy." (I apologise to readers who cannot see this little joke, but it is intended strictly for certain local gunners in whom it will ring a bell !) Even in the late afternoon, when it began to get cold, the seasonal excitement (almost frenzy) of all the marshland birds remained high—the din of whistling and calling wigeon ; the loud quacking of mallard and their gabbling as they chased each other all over the place and across the sky ; the diving and wailing of lapwing ; the drumming of many snipe ; the carolling of blackbirds, and even the coo-ing of a single pigeon which shot into wood, coo-ed and shot out again without being shot at. Later, the *cock-up-cock-up* of many pheasants going up to bed caused eyebrows to be raised above quizzical smiles.

There are times when some of us who are usually careful of detail leave undone some of those things we might have done. I give two instances arising on this day. In the morning, elsewhere, I fired at a passing pigeon, and the bird showed no signs at all of being hit. It flew round the hill-top on which I was standing twice, as though still thinking of settling on the elms there, or dropping down to feed. It must have covered a full mile in its wide circuits. As I watched it, it seemed suddenly to stand still (if one can stand on air !) and then came spinning towards the ground stone dead. The above-mentioned rook which I mistook for a crow acted similarly. It appeared to take no notice of my shot, and passed on for a hundred and fifty yards, before suddenly checking and tumbling to the ground dead. In both cases, the birds had blood issuing from their beaks, but in neither case, for some strange reason, did I examine them to see where they had been hit. As a layman, I would say that they had been pierced in the lung. If so, why did they not tower ? Over to you, my medicos !

Lofted Decoys

Incidentally, lofted pigeon have more uses than attracting the birds they are intended to represent. Last night a carrion crow which had been flying wide and wary, spotted my tree-top decoy and came dropping in with confidence. I have also had magpies and jays, restlessly and suspiciously hopping about a distant watch-tree come flying right in on sighting my lofted decoy. I was surprised, however, one afternoon last year when about a dozen long-tailed-tits came swinging and dancing through the willows, and presently started their gymnastics all round a single pigeon I had lofted. Why should they choose to get so close to the larger "bird ?" They stayed there for nearly thirty seconds, at times almost touching the decoy.

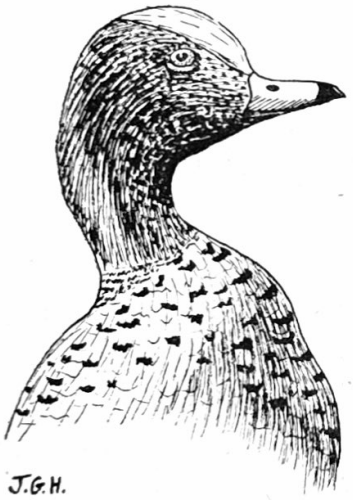
The more I think about bird-watchers as a whole, the less I try to think about them ! In one area alone members of their fraternity have reported to me a herd of forty whooper swans, and another of a dozen Bewicks. Other species "recorded" to me include red-breasted snipe, night-heron, flamingo, heavens knows how many "strange" duck, and now I am informed of a red-breasted goose. Mark you, I do not say that some or all these things *could* not have been seen in the small area concerned, but I doubt most of them. I know that all the swans were mutes, that the flamingo was a spoonbill, the night heron a common heron, and at least some of the duck merely common species. At the same time, one never knows what *will* come along. Who am I to say, for instance, that there is not a red-breasted goose on ground which I am constantly walking ? Nearly a dozen of the species have been recorded in Britain as believed wild, and certainly escapes are not unknown. Full-winged birds which may come from The Wildfowl Trust and other collections are now of many and varied species. But many bird-watchers are enthusiastic amateurs and enthusiastic amateurs can often be over-enthusiastic and extraordinarily imaginative. Thus I greatly fear the "records" of many such, and, as I have said before in my weekly notes, I cannot see that it is impossible for the odd record (which may, in fact, be one of mistaken identity) slipping past even the most experienced club secretary. I, myself, have seen an avocet and spoonbill feeding close together in West Sussex, but would I believe such a "record" from an amateur ? So how can we ever be certain of the truth ?

Five Hundred Miles to Flight

by Jeffery Harrison

THERE is nothing like setting off on holiday at 02.50 in the morning, for an evening flight over 500 miles north in Scotland, especially if one's friends are inclined to think that it verges on madness. That makes it all the more fun. In fact we arrived in time for tea before setting off for flight and in spite of a blow out when travelling at 60 m.p.h. an hour after we had set out. The sight of the first pinkfeet leaving a loch and about 6,000 wigeon flighting out to sea as we neared our destination, inspired us for the final effort.

The geese flighted so late that night that we had to be content with duck, but their calls long after dark raised our hopes for the morning; hopes which were fulfilled by Ginger, who brought off an unusual right-and-left from a skein of five, getting a ringed pinkfooted goose with the right and a young Greenland white-front with the left. I nearly lost my watch that morning, when building a hide of seaweed-covered rocks. It dropped off in the dark and by chance I just noticed the end of the strap protruding from under a rock when it was light. A herd of over 60 mute swans was busily



Variant drake wigeon.

engaged grazing the regenerated zostera beds around me and made me realise how undesirable these great birds are, when in competition with more worthy fowl.

After breakfast it was time to move on to our next stop in the Central Highlands, the calls of a cock wigeon coming from a starling on the chimney of our hotel as we left. On the way we were treated to some astonishing views of 1,000 greylag moving to and from a small loch by the roadside, great skeins whiffling down to the water, almost in shot of the car, with mallard, wigeon and tufted floating peacefully among them.

Down With 'Flu

By the time we arrived in the Highlands, I was a victim of Asian 'flu and had to retire with a high temperature. Next morning the others set off deer-stalking, while I lay in bed and doped myself. By afternoon, my temperature being a little lower, I decided to break all the rules, so got up and went out to a little marsh by the Spey for evening flight. Feeling far from well, I sat on the bank and in the next ten minutes shot a mallard and two wigeon and made a rapid recovery. A small herd of whoopers was grazing nearby and I was treated to a thrilling sight of four more, which arrived from the north over the mountains and slowly glided in, calling quietly as they did so, sounding more like a distant hunting horn than whooper swans.

I was in the bath when the others burst in, grimy, blooded and triumphant, each with their first stag! Cameron Ormiston, who had taken them out, is one of the finest stalkers in the Highlands, but this was the first time he had taken three people out, all to get their first stags on the same day. Lots had been drawn for the stalks, Pam going first, then Ginger and Marion last of all, getting hers as the light was fading. They had seen three golden eagles and a number of ptarmigan.

Next day I was determined to climb up there with the others to try for a ptarmigan and was surprised how well I got up those 3,000 feet. Obviously an evening duck flight is a fine cure for Asian 'flu! As we climbed, a pair of golden eagles sailed over the high tops above us, the male followed by the larger female, bolting the red deer as they soared over them. Perhaps that was what they had done to the ptarmigan too, for yesterday's birds were gone and we saw very few on our long plod through the first snow of winter, only Pam and Marion getting one. Ginger got a grouse and subsequently lost both his big toe nails, because his gumboots were too small—a poor swap! I returned with a clean gun.

That evening we flighted a marsh for greylags which never came and none of us fired a shot at a most magnificent duck flight for fear of frightening the geese. They were in next morning when we paid a fleeting visit at dawn, and in the poor early light their white shoulders made them look like a pack of seagulls as they swept round the marsh before leaving — unscathed.

The Ythan Estuary

After breakfast we were away once more, this time bound for the Ythan estuary. It was here a few years ago that the eiders suffered heavy losses due to hookworm disease and we were keen to explore the area and to collect some wildfowl viscera for study. Crossing the road bridge over the Ythan we spotted a splendid character in breeches and waders crouching behind one of the pillars, complete with 12-bore. He proved to be the water bailiff shooting cormorants and "saw-bills," so we made an early, if somewhat fishy start to our collection. In fact we ran out of formo-saline solution, so went to the only shop labelled "chemist," only to find it was now a "grocer's." They had been meaning to alter the sign for over a year, but had not quite got round to it!

The Ythan is a remarkable estuary, and the tide races out through its narrow mouth. Inland of this, it is wide and sandy, with big mussel beds, and is flanked by sand dunes. The eiders were magnificent, 500 of them, the drakes shining in the sun and cooing like doves. The majority of the drakes were in one big flock and the transition drakes in another, while the ducks tended to line the water's edge. Five long-tailed duck swam and dived in the tide race and beyond. Common scoters were feeding at sea. There was also an adult whooper swan feeding with two mutes in a creek and I was able to stalk and film it at 20 feet, before it swam disdainfully away.

Pam spent a long time looking for pearls in the mussels and discovered that most of them were dead. Whether this has any bearing on the hookworm disease in the estuary I would not know, but she failed to find a pearl. On the way south a few days later, we read that a big one had just been found!

The autumn of 1957 will long be remembered for the number of American "strays" in Britain and the most surprising bird on the Ythan was a greater yellowlegs, a North American "stray," which had only once before been seen in Scotland, one being found in Shetland a few years ago.

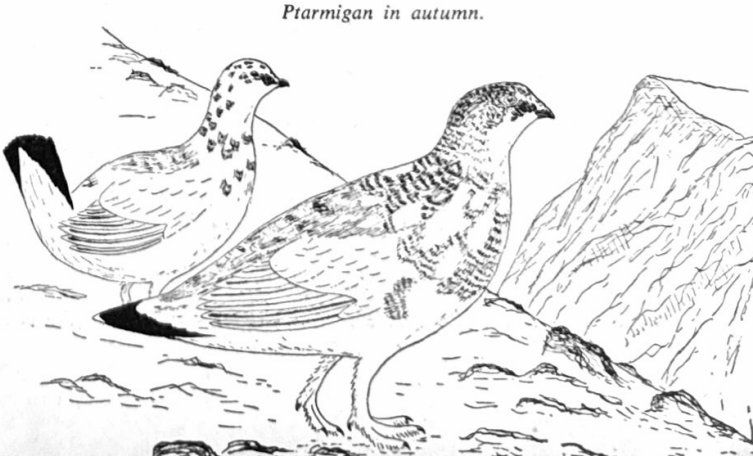
The time had now come to leave, but we paused on route, for a further two days wildfowling. On one evening flight we did well with the wigeon, which were present in Scotland at the end of October in enormous numbers. Our bag included one of the unusual variant drakes with a heavily spotted and barred breast shield. A young black tern was hawking along the tide-line that night—it was October 26, an exceptionally late date for a black tern, which is a comparatively rare bird in Scotland.

The Last Flight

Our last dawn flight took place in a half-gale from the south-west and if we had the courage of our convictions and gone to where we thought the geese would flight, instead of where they had flighted previously, we would have had a tremendous flight. As it was, we still had time to alter our positions by about half a mile and to get three fine pinkfeet out of the last 300 to come in, which made a fine finish to our all too short trip. The time had come to motor southwards to join Peter Scott and his rocket-netting team in England.

I know that in the past many of their rings have not been returned for one reason or another, but the account of our trip would not be complete without mention of the wildfowler we met, who had just shot a pinkfoot carrying an Icelandic ring. He fired 3-inch cartridges from a 2½-inch chambered gun, explaining that he had to chop a bit off the end of each cartridge before ramming it in. (This should not be taken as a red hot tip.) When asked if he would be sending his ring in, he produced quite the most astonishing reason for not doing so, for "his brother in the R.A.F. collected them." We felt tempted to ask if his collection included a good series from R.A.F. carrier pigeons, but did not know quite how best to frame the question. However, we eventually arrived, like the best man at a wedding, clutching our one and only ring to be returned and to enjoy some very strenuous and most exciting wildfowling of a rather different nature.

Ptarmigan in autumn.



A Countryman's Jottings

by Glancer

THOUGHTS about the distance that a dog can swim provoked consideration of a similar, though probably a simpler, conundrum: how far can a dog run? The trouble here, as with swimming, is that no dog is normally asked to go as far as it can, and evidence is therefore lacking. Though spotted dogs trotted at one time beneath the carriages of the gentry, there is no room under the modern motor; and, fortunately, those unhappy treadmill or spinning-wheel dogs are things of the past.

But if for "dog" the word hound is substituted, one can at least attempt to make an estimate. Let us go back a few seasons and imagine a pack of foxhounds without a hound-van—anyway, there are still a few in this antediluvian condition. When hounds hacked on to the meet it was not in the least unusual to cover ten miles in the process, and by evening they might well be a dozen miles from kennel. So they would do, say, twenty miles, putting it on the low side, at a hound jog, without any question of hunting.

What distance does a hound cover in the actual process of drawing for a fox, finding him, and running him? A process that is likely to be repeated at least three times in the four hours of hunting. If one assumes an average sort of scent with a reasonably adventurous fox, it would not be at all out of the way to hear that the pack had had a hunt of around sixty minutes, covering, as they ran, at least eight miles, at the end of which time they marked him to ground.

The importance of this lies in the words "as they ran," for this means, more nearly, as someone *thought* they ran; or "as someone might have ridden more or less in their wake." In point of fact, what with casting themselves for the line at a check, correcting errors, and all the rest, each individual hound would probably have gone about twice as far as the calculated distance on the map. This is not to say that the *fox* went that distance, for if he had they would probably have caught him before he got to ground. Anyway, let us say that each hunting hound went twelve miles, to be on the safe side.

It would seem, therefore, that if hounds are actually hunting (i.e. on the move, not standing about at the earth or elsewhere) for three hours they might cover as much as thirty-five or forty miles on a day with a goodish scent. In actual fact, of course, they often hunt for more than three hours, and the better the scent, the more easily is a fox found, and the more distance are they likely to cover.

All things being considered, it would appear that a foxhound may do about sixty miles in the day, which sounds a very long way in heavy going, with wind and rain, plus the effort involved in crossing streams or ditches, and getting over or through fences and barbed wire.

What About Beagles?

Beagles go very much more slowly than foxhounds during the hunt itself, and they seldom have very far to travel on foot to the meet. The pace of a foxhound as he lopes along is extraordinarily deceptive, almost as deceptive as the pace of a fox as he slips through the woodland, seeming scarcely to toddle, but having come and gone almost before the eye has registered the fact.

Still, beagles measure only about 15 inches in height, and they must frequently cover anything up to thirty miles (the average might be about 20 miles) in the course of a day's hunting—that is to say if they still adhere to the correct principle, and meet at eleven o'clock, or half an hour later. Many packs meet at about one o'clock nowadays, and their days are very short. Meeting at the traditional time, in a country as full of hares as are most today, they are probably on the move continuously, or actually running, for a lot of the time.

It is surely one of the triumphs of scientific breeding that hounds, whatever their breed, can accomplish these distances, and maybe do it twice a week. Uphill, down dale, in rough old countries where any unsoundness of wind or limb would soon find them out, they manage to keep going and to go home not too tired. One takes a lot for granted in the course of a day's hunting!

Perhaps it is because of the wonderful sturdiness in the make-up of the genuine working hound that one's mind is full of misery at the sight of the lumpy animals in the show ring, whose owners get themselves awarded prizes.

And finally there is the working terrier. Take him for a walk, say three miles; how far has he travelled, in the course of his scuffling here and there, rat and rabbit hunting, and all the rest? Probably three times as far, especially if he has the ridiculous inclination to chase every bird that flies, especially sea gulls.

Beer and Witches

A neighbour whose livelihood is concerned exclusively with the production and sale of milk remarked recently that he, and all his brothers and sisters, of whom there were, and still are, a great many, were weaned on nothing but home-brewed ale.

His father and mother regarded milk with the greatest suspicion and never let their family touch the dangerous stuff. Even today, he manages to sustain his fifteen-stone frame without recourse to this particular liquid, and he appears to do very well on it.

There are still plenty of people (not all of them living in the country, either) who brew their own beer in small quantities, for home consumption only, and there is certainly a revival in the making of wines from various vegetables and fruits.

A year or two ago a rather cantankerous and eccentric old gentleman, a widower, departed this life at the ripe age of eighty-four, and with one accord from far and wide his kith and kin descended on his cottage. Never was such a display of family affection, and seldom could such a display have been so unexpected. Many of those assembled were almost strangers to each other, so long was it since they had met—if, in fact, they had ever met at all, which some doubted. Neighbours marvelled at the show of friendliness that prevailed.

It was some time afterwards that the true reason for the homecoming was known. The old chap had built up a most wonderful cellar of home-made wine (especially parsnip) with every bottle signed and dated, so to speak.

The family failed to discover a single drop of alcohol in the place, and some of them prolonged their stay, following the undertaker round, anxious to hear if he let fly a hiccup.

Other Suspicions

Many countrymen used to distrust milk, of course, and some were as loth to drink it as they were to eat hares. Perhaps, in the latter case, there is some lurking and indistinct connection between witchcraft and hares, for jugged hare is still not much liked today. After all, there is a theory that hares and witches are interchangeable beings. Or it may be simply that hares are messy things to prepare for the table!

Belief in witchcraft is much more alive than some folk suppose. There is still at least one old lady—and not so *very* old, either—who can persuade a reluctant fire to burn by making passes in front of it with her empty hands. The thing is, she is cutting the strings that attach the fire to an invisible witch who is determined that it shall not burn. The downfall of the anti-social witch would have been accomplished years ago by other, more violent, measures.

It is not at all surprising that belief in witchcraft should die hard. One has only to observe the successes achieved by quack remedies for maladies beyond the reach of scientific cure to realise how quickly the human mind reacts to the "supernatural." Admittedly, there is the understandable and tragic hope of a cure at any price, by any means—but ancient superstition also plays its part.

Bring Our Your Dead

And whilst on the subject of funerals, illnesses and other light-hearted depressions, the matter of animal funerals is one that always tickles the fancy. One may doubt if some of the incidents so designated are funerals at all, but the fact remains that there have been occasions when any other explanation was hard to sustain.

There are several recorded badger funerals, one being a quite recent example which is very hard to disbelieve, even if one wanted to do so. We are told that stoats and weasels are liable to perform in the same fashion.

Some years ago Mr. J. G. Miller told the story in *Field Sports* of something that he was convinced was an otter funeral—this seems to be the only one of its kind?

On the occasion in question, something in the nature of a cairn of stones, and quite big stones at that, had been built up over the corpse of an otter (a dog otter, if memory serves) and though he did not see the work in progress, he heard stones being trundled around and dropped and found wet padding of at least one otter on the site. He went into a great deal of detail in telling the story, and it was hard to doubt that the dead body had been covered by one or more living otters. In one respect the story differed from most of its kind, for the remains under the stones were very dead indeed; there had been no effort to arrange the funeral at the earliest opportunity, so much was clear.

Is it really surprising that animals should conduct funerals? Little more is implied than that the living relatives wish to remove the dead from their sett or earth or hole or whatever it may be. It seems reasonable enough as an alternative to finding new accommodation. Maybe, funerals only occur when the death takes place at home, so to speak.

Probably it is unusual for an animal to come to its death in its home surroundings. In the course of a hunting season innumerable earths are opened up and it is rare to find even a skeleton—very rare indeed, I would think. The same applies in the matter of badger-digging. Does one find rat bones in a rat hole? Of course, there are many scavengers, the living of the various species included, sometimes, but one would expect that there would be more skeletons around if animals often died at home.

Presumably, animals go elsewhere at the end of their lives, and it is only when they are clumsy enough to die at home that funerals occur.

A real provider of sport when the game season is passed.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

ALTHOUGH the end of the game shooting season usually ushers in a slack time for many sportsmen, they still have the chance to do some ferreting before rabbit breeding becomes general. It is true that this sport is not always appreciated fully by those crack shots who specialise in difficult winged game; but bolted rabbits can nevertheless test the utmost skill of anyone at times. If one is not warned by a preliminary rumble, they are apt to appear at the most unexpected places, and they lose no time in getting back to cover of some kind.

This demands rigid attention, accurate judgment, and quick shooting. In a moment one must often decide whether the rodent can really be shot before it reaches another hole, and whether it can be shot safely if a second ferret has just been seen there. One must also decide in a flash whether the rabbit can be shot dead; for a wounded animal may get to ground, and cause the ferret or ferrets to lie up.

But whether a wounded rabbit gets to ground or not, far too many ferrets are inclined to lie up when the spirit moves them, and it is probably this habit more than anything else which puts ferreting somewhat out of favour with high-class shots. The man is at the mercy of a not-too-intelligent helper. No matter how cold the day may be, or how wet it is, the tardy ferret will not surface until it is ready to do so. And if it has had a good feed underground, or is tired after several hours of work, it may curl up and go to sleep beside its victim.

Occasionally it may be coaxed out by the smell of a fresh rabbit paunch, but often the only alternative to waiting is digging, and that is seldom exciting enough to be called sport by members of the upper classes, although some keepers and others think otherwise. Nevertheless, ferreting to the gun on a good bolting day can be genuine sport of a unique kind. Whereas winged game can generally be seen in ample time by the shooter, ferreted rabbits do not offer him that advantage.

A Not Uncommon Attitude

However, if ferreting is rather neglected by gentleman shooters, it is practised with enthusiasm by thousands of ordinary people who rarely get a chance to shoot much game, and this includes many keepers. In fact, several years ago a moorland keeper told me that he intended to seek another job partly because he could not get enough ferreting where he was, to occupy his time interestingly after the game season had finished. And his attitude is, with variations, quite common. Some keepers prefer only to shoot, and either work their ferrets muzzled, or have exceptionally good animals, which come out quickly, when they encounter dour rabbits; others enjoy an occasional dig, if it produces several rabbits to make up for wasted shots; while a small minority are happy, if they have to dig most of the day, and will take a line ferret with them to make their digging more certain.

Fourteen Up a Dead End

At one place where I was employed the headkeeper almost invariably took a big liner when we went on our numerous ferreting forays. One might suggest that he did this to clean up the rabbits more effectively; but the time spent in digging can generally offset this advantage, and I am sure that our bag would have been as big without the liner. The truth is that this man, who was big and powerful, enjoyed killing rabbits in a primitive fashion. The soil was sandy and clean, and he shifted it vigorously, until he could push his arm into a dead end, and pull out two or three.

Incidentally, the greatest number of full-grown rabbits ever got in one dead end, as far as I am aware, was 14. This astonishing lot was unearthed by another headkeeper on Blinkbonny Hill, Kincardineshire, which was an enclosed warren 40 years ago. My own best bag in the same circumstances was seven, but I once bolted and dug out nine mature rabbits from a single tunnel about 10 feet long, which had an exit at both sides of a rotten tree stump. They had not been chased in by a dog or anything else; so I have never been able to explain this happening. After I had bolted and shot several, and realised that more remained, I hurriedly blocked one entrance, otherwise I might have lost some of this rich haul.

It is hard to say whether the too hasty digging of burrows (without the guidance of a liner) accounts for more lost ferrets than anything else, but it certainly is an important factor. The impatient and inexperienced man is apt to grab a spade, and get to work in a scrappy way, if his ferret has neither bolted anything nor shown itself for 20 minutes. He takes two or three feet off one entrance, then pushes in a stick, and digs straight down on the tunnel. Next he listens intently, and decides that an approach ought to be made from another entrance, and so on, until he has probably blocked in his helper securely. Occasionally he belts away savagely in an attempt to enlarge an entrance which has become inconveniently deep with his digging, and brains the emerging ferret with his spade. Only once have I seen a blocked in ferret suffocated, but no doubt this occurs more often than we imagine.

Leaving Without Being Seen

Ferrets are also lost because they manage to leave a burrow without being noticed. This can happen where undercover is near, or where a low bank screens the escaping creature, and allows it to get to ground elsewhere. Once I lost a ferret from a burrow within a few yards of some laurel bushes. As I stood vainly waiting for it to appear, I heard a terrier bark excitedly on a right-of-way path beyond the bushes, but only when the barking became mingled with the jabbering of human voices did I push through to find out what the matter was. On the path were two youths, who were looking intently into the cover. One said to me: "I've just been telling him to keep his dog in, or it'll come off second best." Then I saw my ferret with its back up facing the yapping terrier. If I had been a little later, I probably would have found a corpse. The youths had no idea that the ferret was a domesticated animal.

Which reminds me that although hundreds of ferrets must be lost annually in this country we have not yet got a wild breed. Apparently the ones that get away sound in wind and limb never manage to mate successfully. It may be argued that those wandering ferrets are either killed or picked up again within a few weeks, but surely there must be exceptions, particularly in thinly populated districts.

But ferrets are not all fun. This week I heard of two which broke out of their hutch, and one of them started to satisfy its blood-lust immediately. Perhaps I had better let the Lincolnshire lady co-owner describe the incident herself, because her language is certainly graphic:

"The previous night had been very windy; and when I went out to feed the fowls, I saw that the top door had been blown off a hut which held the bantams. I looked inside, and what I saw will haunt me always. All the birds were lying dead in a heap. It was a dreadful sight. I feared then to go to the other chicken huts in case something had happened there too.

"While I was walking away, I turned my head towards the scene of the tragedy, and saw one of our ferrets peeping from under the bantam hut. All at once I felt like a lump of jelly, because I really detest ferrets. Years ago I was bitten right through a finger by one of them. It held on, and I have never forgotten the awful experience. A few seconds later I discovered that both ferrets were at liberty. They had torn the wire-netting on the front of their hutch; so I knew that I would have to do something quickly. All our neighbours keep poultry, and I did not want anything worse to happen.

"In desperation I went for a tin of gas, shoved a spoonful under the bantam hut, and bunged up the hole with a bag. I had to fetch help to lift the hut, and found only one ferret dead. But after some frantic searching I saw the other look out from underneath its own hutch. I was relieved. I quickly put on a pair of thick gloves, and managed to catch the creature with the help of some butcher's offal as bait."

Obviously a real live cow. Or could it conceal a gunner?

The Young Shot

Post Hotpot Thoughts

by Petrel

UNTIL a few days ago, high on my not so short list of places to be avoided stood the city of Liverpool. I had been there but once before and the place held unhappy memories other than those that might reasonably be expected by any countryman. On that afternoon the dank, grey mist which shrouded the unconsidered advance of Russian Hero effectively cloaked with equal efficiency the equally unexpected and untimely retreat of a misbegotten turf accountant whose pockets were lined in part with my modest winnings from a previous investment. As a result, a typically unprofitable day was remembered even more miserably after a jostling trek to the station and a tedious, hungry journey home to Cotswold civilisation.

That, thought I, is the first and last time. But needs must when the devil drives, and the chairman of the Dee Wildfowlers' Association is the devil of a driver, who refuses to take no for an answer—which, of course, is largely the reason for his club's enormous success—so even if I had wanted to, I could hardly refuse his kind invitation to attend the Dee W.A.'s annual hotpot on the last night of February.

And what a pleasant contrast this was to my first visit. I saw Liverpool and its environs in a completely different light—besides the River Dee by moonlight, incidentally—and reflected on the way home that if any wildfowler is still in any doubt about the value of fowling clubs or sceptical that an association of any size can run smoothly and efficiently, a visit to this, the largest and one of the liveliest, would soon set his mind at rest.

All-Round Support

The success of any club depends in the first place on its officers, but ultimately upon the measure of support that they receive from the other members. The majority of wildfowling clubs are successful in their own sphere, but more than a few of them are content to let a handful of enthusiasts do all the work. During my all too short sojourn with the Dee gunners, I could not help feeling that this did not apply in their case. Here is a club that is indeed lucky in the spirit that prevails throughout its many members. It is also, of course, fortunate in having so many shooting opportunities to offer, but these have only accrued as a result of concerted effort by all ranks.

Memories of that evening are still a mite hazy, and although a greater part of conversation concerned wildfowling in general, I cannot recall much talk of specific methods, tactics and so on. But it was interesting to meet the only fowler I know who still uses a stalking horse in his pursuit of geese. In nearly all the old books on the sport mention is made of this form of deception, but it is seldom practised nowadays. Which does not surprise me overmuch, for I would say that the majority of modern gunners are slow to experiment with dodges old or new. And this may be just as well insofar as the stalking horse is concerned, for my neighbour at table the other night remarked that the use of his "animal" made the stalking of geese too easy; so much so, in fact, that he now preferred to film the fowl with a cine camera at close range from behind its skin.

A Cow Hide

To be exact, his is no horse at all, but a stalking cow which to my mind must be an advantage for more than one reason.

In the first place, cows are nowadays much more likely to be seen about marshes and saltings than horses, and therefore, being animals to which geese are presumably accustomed, less likely to arouse their suspicion. This is, however, open to doubt, for in reply to my question whether a lone cow might not appear an obvious "phoney" if it suddenly appeared on a salting where no cattle had grazed for some time; and after all cattle are not so often turned loose below the sea wall save in the summer months when no geese are present; I was assured that this made little or no difference. Geese, in my informant's opinion, can recognise a cow as a cow at first sight, and provided that the silhouette screen bears a passable resemblance to the creature it is meant to represent, a close approach is perfectly possible.

It is, of course, little use attempting to make a direct advance with such a screen. A cow is no speedy grazer so the stalk must be slow and steady, the object being to pass within range of the birds on a flank. The late Stanley Duncan used to describe a more elaborate cow hide complete with movable head through which the front gunner would make his shot, and this was in the nature of a complete skin that concealed front and back legs on the all-round pantomime principle. Ensconced in this, it was possible to make a direct approach, but the silhouette frame is a more manageable proposition.

The other advantage of a cow over a horse becomes apparent when other genuine beasts of either sort are encountered by the stalking fowlers. Horses are more easily scared or upset than cattle, and the sight of a couple of stalkers suddenly appearing on the blind side of a supposedly innocent nag is likely to send them frisking away in alarm and scaring the fowl in turn.

I should like to hear from others who may still employ this old-fashioned method of fowling. In this modern age, doubtless all sorts of modifications and improvements could be incorporated.

The nearest I have come so far to trying a similar system, was when I attempted to stalk a party of mallard on an inland splash behind the cover of a landscape painting. The canvas was one of several found lying in a barn, and I was taking these on their frames one by one down into the valley with the idea of building a temporary water-side hide. Holding a picture before me, and battling with the wind, I got within no more than fifty yards of the birds before they realised that the purple of a moorland scene looked somewhat out of place against the green and grassy background. Perhaps, if the painting had depicted grazing cattle, I might have been luckier. But somehow I doubt it.

Highly Concentrated

Another relic of the past came to light on the same evening when a member of the club presented me with an Eley wire cartridge for my small collection. This conjured up the days when the policy of getting within range of the fowl rather overshadowed the more modern and enlightened maxim of getting the fowl within range. Today we stress the importance of short range work that depends more on the guile of the fowler rather than his ability to deliver maximum shot charges at incredible ranges, and quite rightly so. But not so long ago one hundred yards was not considered too prodigious a distance at which to take a shot at wildfowl and many ingenious devices were evolved to concentrate the shot charge for long range efficiency.

The most usual type of concentrator consisted of a small cylinder, about half-an-inch in length, made of hard paper, or, later, aluminium, which was loaded into the cartridge so that it contained the shot and thus prevented the normal spread of pellets on firing. Forming, in effect, a solid ball, they were not suitable for use in a choked barrel, but from a cylinder barrel it was claimed for the Charles Lancaster concentrator, for example, that it improved the shooting by as much as twenty-five per cent. A much more ambitious device was the automatic shrapnel shell.

This was composed of two brass segments filled with shot joined by a wire spindle to one end of which was attached a card wad. When this shell left the gun, air pressure acting on the wad withdrew the spindle, the segments fell apart and the shot was liberated in "a highly concentrated form." Lethal fowling range was claimed as 140 yards, or even farther with shot larger than No. 5!

It was hardly surprising that these shells did not enjoy excessive popularity. There was no guarantee that they would open, the shot was liable to ball, pattern and penetration were irregular, and imagine carrying a pocketful of these spikey projections.

More refreshing is to know that even in those distant days when the whole approach to sport was much "tougher" than it is in modern times, inventions of this nature were hardly considered sporting in many circles. One writer of the age described them as "carrying things a little too far."

Had they carried more consistently, however, it is just possible that he might have revised his opinion.

A Moorland Keeper

by Alan Grant

TO me, he will always remain a sort of Admirable Crichton among the many keepers I have met on the Scottish moors. He was of medium height, with broad shoulders; there was a friendliness in his twinkling eyes, an obvious sense of humour about his bearded, weather-beaten face, and he was filled with an inborn love, not only for all mankind, but, also, for all the wild creatures that breathed the air around him. Yet, with this almost feminine tenderness within him, he was always rigid in his discipline when out shooting; could be outspoken to a degree of rudeness whenever he noticed a breach of etiquette, and was easily the best shot I have encountered during my long association with the moors of Scotland.

Such are the bare facts about James MacBride, whose blood was inherited from hardy ancestors who had lived on and around the heather long before the preservation of grouse was ever thought of, and the peace of the moorlands was first shattered by the noise of guns.

James had arrived in Ayrshire from the Highlands when he was 25, and his first appointment in the south was as gamekeeper to an estate consisting of some ten thousand acres of unkeepered moors. There was no lodge for the laird, and the only accommodation available for himself throughout the year, as well as for his master and his small shooting party during August and September, was an old farmstead, with its rambling outhouses. It was less than a year after his arrival, however, that the laird, a great-uncle of mine, having for long been enchanted with the beautiful and peaceful surroundings, decided to settle on the moors permanently. A lodge was built, as well as cottages for James and other estate employees, and a stone road was gradually laid across the heather to a sleepy little village, five miles away.

Plenty To Do

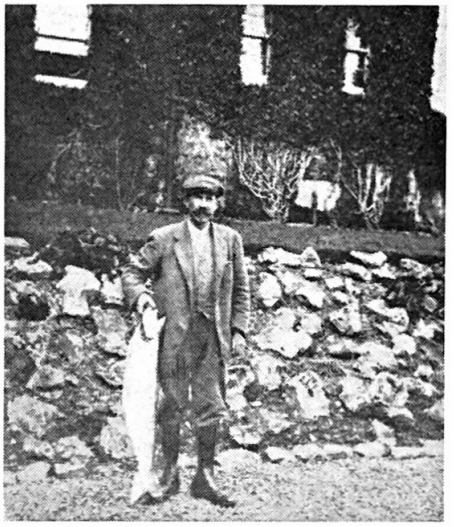
James, true to his profession, was always busy. From the autumn onwards until the following shooting season opened, there was the continual setting of traps over the vast expanse of neglected moors to combat the ever-menacing number of predators; there was the building of new butts and the repairing of those that had been damaged in the winter gales; there was the supervision of the burning of the large strips of old heather; and, in the deep of winter, when the snow in the corries lay level with the braes, James would spend many days far across the moors helping the shepherd to dig out his sheep.

But, especially in his early years in Ayrshire, before he had an underkeeper to help him, it was the period between the time the grouse had begun to lay their eggs until the opening of the shooting season that James' worries were the greatest. For during that trying time there were, naturally, more perils that grouse chicks had to face than nowadays, and it was, of course, as it is now, one of a moorland gamekeeper's normal and most important jobs to keep as thorough a check as possible on the stock of birds so that he could estimate the number to be shot during the season.

But in spite of all his hard and endless work, James did manage to snatch a few leisure hours away from his routine duties. When the water in the river and in the burns was at the right level, he would frequently wander to one or another of the quiet pools and experiment with a home-made fly. And he spent many hours in training his, as well as other people's, young dogs to the gun. No keeper in the south-west of Scotland had a greater reputation for his gundogs than James, and he is still something of a local legend regarding them. He always treated them in a more human way than do many keepers, made a point of feeding them himself, even after he had retired and it was difficult for him to move about without the aid of a stick, and they, in return, always repaid him with all their faithfulness and love.

James had always had a great horror of firing at a bird or beast when there was the chance of only wounding it, and, at the end of a day's shooting, when the bag was being counted, he never failed to remark pointedly to anyone who had been guilty of firing continually at extreme range:

"Ye realise, o' course, Mr. So-and-So, that had we had nae dogs wi' us tae-dei, ye would have had dam' little tae show in the bag frae your ain gun."



James with "a fine flush."

And James, too, was one of those uncanny fishermen who could kill a salmon or a sea-trout before one's eyes when those fishing near him had not had so much as a rise at their fly. On many occasions, I, with others, have been out most of the day with a rod and returned home disappointed and empty-handed, only to be informed on arrival that James had brought in "a fine fush."

Proof of His Skill

One instance in particular of James' prowess with a rod stands out in memory. It was a wet, rather misty day, and a fresh wind from the east made it anything but ideal for casting. The river, though the water was falling, was still swollen, and it was quite obvious that along the beat we intended fishing, the most likely spots to take a fish were in the less turbulent streams below the rapids. I took the upper stream and James the lower. For an hour or more, I cast up and down the length of the stream, but no fish rose to my fly, and, at last, having all but lost interest, I wandered down to where James was fishing. On arriving at his side, I was amazed to see two beautiful sea-trout lying on the heather by his tackle.

"Any luck, Sur?" he asked me, and, when I answered "No," he annoyed me a little by saying "That's dam' funny." Anyhow, I had had enough for one day, but before packing up, he insisted upon me returning to the stream in which I had been fishing to have "just a few last casts for luck." I gave in to him as I always did. He was using a big Jock Scott, and at his third cast across the stream, his line began to "belly" in the current, and almost immediately, and to my great surprise, it tightened hard. I knew at once that James had hooked a heavy fish and for two or three minutes he played it. Then, suddenly, his rod went up, his long line went loose, and the fish was gone.

I was disappointed to say the least, for we had guests arriving on the morrow, and a salmon would have been welcome. Was James disappointed? No.

"A'll just have anither go at him" was all he had to say about the matter, then dropped his fly well beyond and below the spot where he had hooked his fish a few minutes before. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw his line tighten hard again, and, this time, there was no doubt about the fish being well and truly hooked. It bolted downstream, then broke the surface at the far end before starting to lash about the water. Presently it became quieter and pulled away towards the lower rapids. Here it wallowed about for a bit, then turned again to make a determined run back towards the spot where it had been hooked. It was all over in ten minutes or so, and, later, when I asked James how it was that he could catch a fish in a spot where I had tried for an hour and failed, he replied facetiously:

"Maybe yon salmon didna like the brand o' the tobacco ye were smokin'."

I then let the matter drop.

Sunday Treat

On Sundays, when the weather was fine, children from the village often walked across the moors to visit James in his cottage. He had given them tea or milk, with scones and jam made by the shepherd's wife, and after this feast was over, he would listen attentively to the childish tales they were ever eager to tell him. He loved them all, in particular, perhaps, the 10-year-old son of the village postman, and for long afterwards enjoyed repeating a story about the lad when he, with a friend, was caught fishing on a Sabbath by the local Minister. The two boys were lectured, at length, on the evilness of their act, also, on what would befall them if they ever did such a thing again, and the holy man had gone but a short distance on his way, when he overheard one say to the other:

"Yon durty auld deevil shoold be deid an' undergroond th' noo."

James had been married, but his wife had died tragically a few months later. So, in the loneliness of the long winter evenings in his cottage, he had turned to his books. He had not possessed a large number, nor did he ever attempt to add to his stock. He seemed to have been quite content to read each one over and over again.

Doubtless there are and will again be men like James in this world of ours, and all I can say is that, when their time comes to leave it, I sincerely hope that they will receive a similar tribute to his. It was from a sportsman who knew the keeper well, and it is certainly one that I would very much like to have paid to me when my number finally goes up in the frame.

"If, in the place to which James has gone, there should be a gathering of sportsmen, I am certain that he will be one of the most distinguished of those present."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

MAGPIES EATING SHOT PIGEON

Sir,—During the week of snow which made the shooting of pigeon much easier, I thought readers might be interested in an incident which happened one morning when I was decoying on cauliflowers. A pigeon which I had hit, but failed to kill cleanly, landed in a tree some eighty yards farther on from where I had built a hide. I left it for a few minutes, and sure enough it dropped out of the tree dead. I did not bother to pick it up then as I was busy dealing with others.

After about half-an-hour, I walked over and got the shock of my life. Two very hungry magpies had set about the pigeon and had completely eaten the head, neck, and most of the breast. I stood there astonished as the two corvines made a very hasty retreat.

I know magpies eat chickens, etc., but I have never heard of them eating pigeon before, especially in such a short time, and while I was still shooting.

I am a very keen reader of *The Shooting Times*.

DEREK A. WRIGHT,
Cheshire.

MINK CAUGHT IN TUNNEL TRAP

Sir,—An unusual capture was made in a tunnel trap on Sir John Craster's estate in Northumberland on February 17. The animal, which was black, measured 25in. from tip to tail, and was later proved to be a mink. It had obviously been living well, to judge by its fine coat and plump condition.

The mink was presented by Sir John to the Hancock Natural History Museum, Newcastle, and theirs was the identification.

H. SPENCER (Keeper),
Craster, Northumberland.

[The nearest approach to this unusual catch that we, ourselves, made in a tunnel trap was two escaped "prairie dogs"—rather like earless rabbits, and large guinea pigs to look at—which had escaped months before from Nuneham Park in Oxfordshire.—Ed.]

THE HARE THAT ESCAPED

Sir,—The shooters of Hesketh Bank thought this to be one of the biggest coincidences of the season. While out shooting pigeon, my brother and two friends saw a sitting hare and were tempted to shoot (this incident happened on March 1).

One took aim cocking the left choke barrel at the hare, with the result, "click and no bang"—a broken hammer-spring. His friend, taking aim at the same hare, now on the run, with his left choke barrel cocked, pressed the trigger—and click, but no shot. His hammer-spring had also broken.

I. MCKEAN,
Hesketh Bank.

[That should larn 'em !—Ed.]

ABOUT THIS AND THAT

Sir,—Some weeks ago, I wrote to you about a pair of kestrels, and I would like to report that these birds are still on their territory. I look forward to the time when I hope they will nest in the area. They are still very tame.

Many fruit farmers in S.E. England have a bullfinch problem on their hands. These destructive little birds strip the buds from young fruit trees wholesale, seemingly for sheer devilment. I have seen the damage for myself as we have forty acres of young apple trees where I work.

My employer asked me some time ago to try and thin out the bullfinch population a little, but I have found them shy and wary.

Until a week or so ago, the snow lay nine inches deep and they became quite bold, feeding on any seed that showed above the snow during that week. I accounted for no less than eighteen birds. It would have been easy enough to have doubled that figure.

Much very interesting correspondence has appeared in "Letters to the Editor" concerning bird accidents. I myself, have seen quite a few at different times of the year. Swans often collide with the telegraph wires. One morning, I found a dead cuckoo beside the road. I expect it had hit the overhead wires.

Yesterday, after feeding our herd of breeding sows (they are on free range), I walked the fence all round, to see that it was still "pig proof," and there, hanging on the fence by the wood, was a dog fox. At first, I thought someone had shot him and left him there for all to see, but a closer inspection showed that Reynard had jumped the fence, but unlucky for him his back legs hooked and fell through the top meshes, and there he was! Either the impact, or his last struggles for freedom broke both his legs.

I cannot quite understand why this accident happened, because I am certain that he was on his regular "run," and must have jumped this fence in the same place dozens of times.

Pig-netting is made of heavy gauge wire about 5in. mesh and 2ft. 9in. high, which is an easy jump for a full-grown dog fox.

C. F. PIGGOTT,
Peasmarsh, Sussex.

SUSSEX RIFES

Sir,—I was interested in "A Countryman's Jottings" by "Glancer" (issue February 14) and "Tower-Bird's" "About This and That" (issue February 21). "Tower-Bird" is quite right in saying that a brook of Essex becomes a rife of Sussex.

Rife is an old Saxon word for stream (at least that is what my schoolmaster told us and he was well up in these subjects especially the village where I was born). Our village was South Bersted which altered from the Saxon word Burghstede through the years, and like Felpham which was owned by Alfred the Great were both Saxon fishing villages before Bognor came into existence.

At the north side of South Bersted the river, which has always been called "the rife," runs from Aldingbourne near the foot of the downs out to the sea at Felpham. It is a natural stream, and is approximately about seven miles long—that is if you take in the bends, or the way it winds on its course. It gradually widens until it is about forty feet across on and near the mouth at Felpham.

This rife was never a man-made watercourse and if it had been, it would have been a wonderful feat of engineering in Saxon days.

Let "Glancer" look at a map of Bognor and the surrounding country, as the rife is marked "Aldingbourne Rife": this is the main rife. I am not sure if the Pagham rifes are marked.

Oddly enough I have never heard the word rife mentioned outside the area I have described, and "brook" is the word usually used, but beck I have never heard spoken of in Sussex. I think of a beck as a mountain stream.

It appears that "Glancer" has practically convinced "Tower-Bird" that a rife is, in fact, a man-made stream, but I'm afraid that he would never convince me, or hardly any of the villagers at the villages I have mentioned above. In fact, I am sure he would get some mighty queer looks (as would anybody else) if he mentioned that the rife was man-made in any of the villages just outside Bognor. If "T.-B." or "Glancer" has a weekend to spare this summer, I will willingly show them the rife which was not man-made, and walk from the mouth at Felpham the whole length to Aldingbourne; and then go to another place where it starts again at Aldingbourne and follow it back through Flansham on to where it joins once again the rife which comes from Aldingbourne, this meeting point being at South Bersted. The walk would be about fourteen miles, both streams being about seven miles long.

I used to go eel-spearing when I was a boy along the rife with an old-timer named "Soldier Denyer," and also quoding as the locals called it. A bath on a pole floated on the rife; another pole hung close to the water with a bunch of worms tied on to worsted wool. The eels came up for the worms, got caught on the wool, and were dropped into the bath.

I never could find out where the word quoding came from, but it still hangs on.

By the way, the eel-spear old Soldier used was a three-speared one, like a trident fixed on a very long hickory shaft.

MALLARD,
Sussex.

The annual hare shoot was held on the Leckford Estate, and farmers, keepers and their sons and friends had a good day, killing 350 hares.

Sir,—In his article (issue February 14) "Glancer" suggested that a rife in Sussex is only a man-made ditch, and not any sort of stream as "Tower-Bird" implies—but he prudently confesses to "a nasty feeling that 'Tower-Bird' usually comes out right." In my opinion, they are both wrong! The word rife is found in West Sussex to mean the same thing as a haven in East Sussex—a stream draining low-lying inland areas into the sea and not of sufficient size or importance to be called a river, which in any case would have risen relatively far inland, beyond the purely coastal areas.

The Rev. W. D. Parish in "A Dictionary of the Sussex Dialect" 1875, gives the derivation of rife as the Anglo-Saxon "rithe"—"a fountain, well or rivulet—a small stream usually one occasioned by heavy showers of rain." I do not think the West Sussex rife or East Sussex haven is necessarily man-made—they are natural drains into the sea.

While on the subject, there is another point on which I think we could have a tilt at "Tower-Bird." Remember he is in West Sussex where we do not speak of a marsh at all. The sort of place which he refers to as a marsh would certainly be called a marsh or "the levels" in East Sussex, but here it is "the brooks." Elsewhere a brook is a stream, but in West Sussex it is dry land (at least in the summer, but liable to flood in winter), and intersected by dykes or open drains. Even a single low-lying field by a river would be called the "brook."

I have often thought of teasing "Tower-Bird" about this when we have been out together, but realise he is writing for a far wider public than just the slow, lazy fellows in West Sussex, so if he used the local word "brooks" to indicate his inland duck shooting country, his readers would imagine him "up to the neck in a dick"—our local pronunciation of ditch or dyke.

There is no doubt "Tower-Bird" "comes out right" when he says Sussex people are lazy—we are, and there is no denying it. How can anyone with his energy and fun ever understand a lot of chaps with their mugs just sitting quietly thinking—or sometimes only just sitting . . . but there it is, as he rightly says "we won't be druv."

SILLY SUSSEX.

["Tower-Bird" writes: "It is something to have spurred two of my old Sussex friends to take up their pens. I know that 'Silly Sussex' is a keen hunting and shooting man, but I did not know that he was such a good ornithologist and botanist as to add at least two birds and a flower to the British List—namely the brooks-harrier, the brooks-tit, and the brooks-marigold!"—Ed.]

KEEPERS AND REPEATERS

Sir,—Being a gamekeeper and a very keen reader of *The Shooting Times* I have scanned the pages in vain each week in the hope of finding an article on the merits, if any, of the

repeating shotgun, against the more usual double barrel in relation to the duties of a keeper, including vermin destruction, and occasional visits to clay and woodpigeon shoots. Has any reader any advice to offer please?

C. W. ROBERTS,
Oswestry.

A COYPU SHOT

Sir,—Last Saturday evening I was lucky enough to see and to shoot a coypu rat. It was swimming along a dyke on my father's marshes at Kessingland, Suffolk. When I saw it, I picked up a stone and ran after it. When it saw me running towards it, it ducked under and swam along beneath the water.

When within fifteen yards, I threw another stone at it, and hit it on the back. It then came up, and I shot it. It turned over and floated down the dyke. I picked it out as it went under the bridge.

Having taken it home, I weighed and measured it. It weighed 14lb., and was 3ft. 2in. long.

This seems rather big to me, and I would like to know if any of your readers could give me any information on the coypu.

RICHARD FREDERICK WRIGHT (aged 15),
Woodbridge, Suffolk.

[No doubt our contributor, Alan Savory, who used to breed coypu, will give you a few facts about them in a future issue. In the meantime, below is a photograph of some young ones.—Ed.]

CARTRIDGE AND CHAMBER LENGTHS

Sir,—Most of the arguments put forward against the use of 2½in. cases in 2¾in. and 3in. chambered guns are based on a misconception.

Most cartridges have a total wadding made up of 1/10in. card wad over the powder, then ⅜in. to ½in. felt or paper wad topped by another 1/10in. card wad making a total well in excess of the ½in. maximum disparity between cartridge and chamber length. Even allowing for a little compression of the wadding when fired, the front of the wadding enters the barrel before the rear leaves the cartridge case, so how can the gas possibly leak round the wadding?

This brings us to the most important matter of wadding and my own experience leads me to believe that the paper cushion wad is on occasions inclined to twist, when short cases are used in long chambers, giving them poor patterns. The twisting can be readily understood if one picks up a paper-cushion wad after being fired. One can then see how narrowly it has been compressed. To support this theory I have picked up paper-cushion wads compressed on only one side—usually from an old gun with taper-coned chambers.

Using 2½in. cases loaded with 7/16in. hard felt wad with 1/10in. card wad each side in a 3in. chambered gun I have never experienced poor patterns when tested on the plate.

To play safe I would say ½in. disparity between cartridge case and chamber length makes little or no difference to the pattern, and ½in. is acceptable as long as the wadding is of a type that stays deep enough when fired, to bring the gap between end of case and beginning of barrel.

MAGNUM,
Merioneth.

GUN CLEANING

Sir,—It amuses me to read so many letters in respect of cleaning a shotgun. One would think from the large number of writers asking for and giving advice as to the best way to keep a shotgun free from pitting, that it was a job requiring an amount of skill and experience not possessed by the majority of shooting men these days.

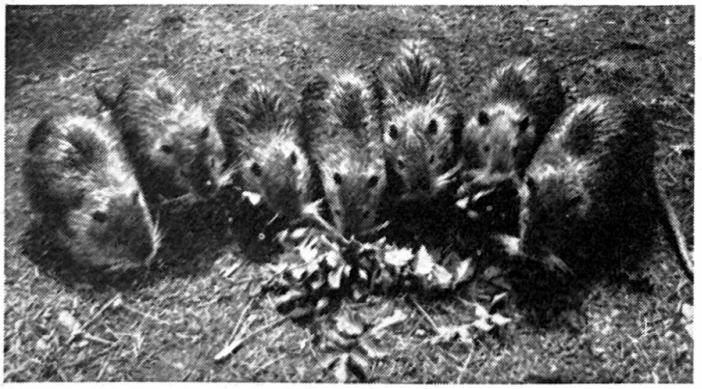
It is a fact that nine out of ten second-hand guns in gun shops show pitting in a greater or lesser degree; only one in ten is as new. Such a state of affairs is not due to the difficulty of keeping the barrels in first-class condition for want of knowledge of the right thing to use to counteract the harmful effect of powder gases. The reason is carelessness and probably laziness of the owner.

After fifty years' experience with shotguns, many of them being in the black powder days, and having used every available brand of smokeless powder, I can truthfully say my guns are free from pitting. I have a gun bought second-hand in 1905 the barrels of which are "as new" except that the lapping is not quite as bright as when purchased. I have another pair of barrels purchased in 1928 (30 years ago) which are definitely in mint condition. It may interest some readers to know how I managed to keep my guns in such first-rate condition. Here is the "secret."

No matter how tired one is, don't go to bed after a long day's shooting without first drying and cleaning your gun. Remove the residue with a rag soaked in paraffin, dry out the barrels with another rag and then oil thoroughly with any good oil (mineral). I use "3-in-One." Never give your gun to another person to clean after a day's shooting.

H.A.C.,
Galway.

[While agreeing with the sentiments of our correspondent we would advise against the use of paraffin, which if not very carefully dried out, encourages rust—Ed.]



Young coypu in captivity enjoying a meal. (See letter, "A Coypu Shot.")

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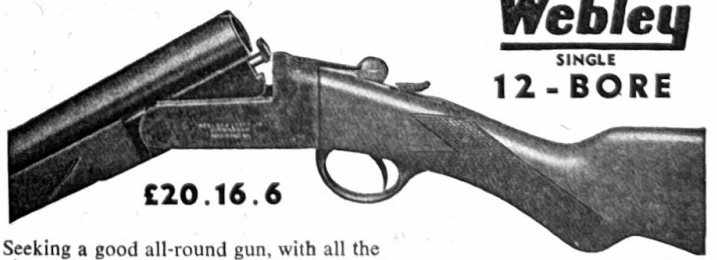

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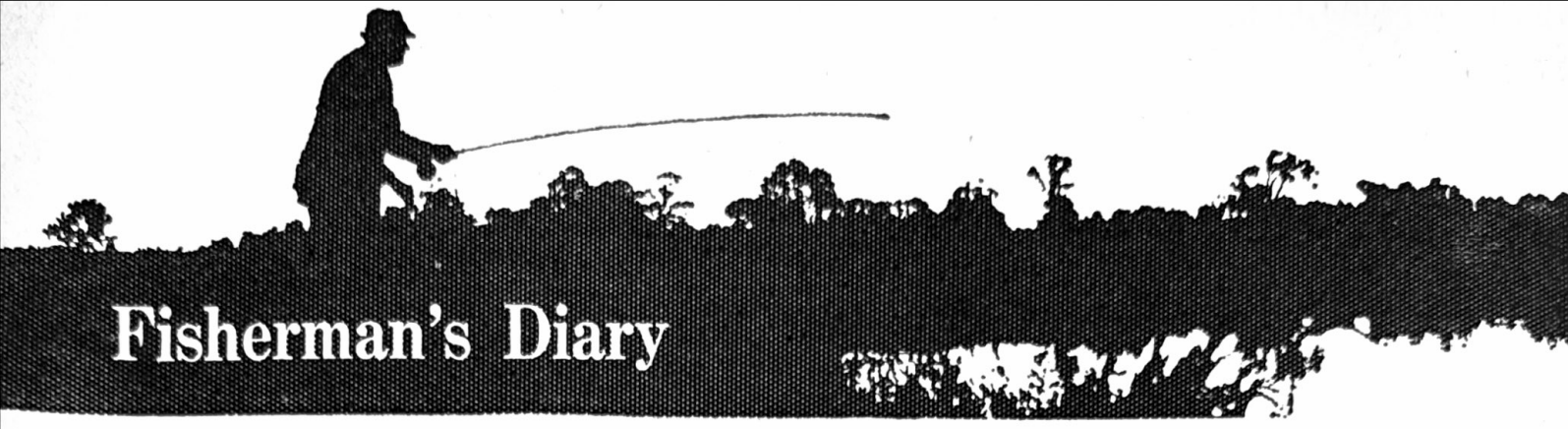


Fisherman's Diary

A GOOD many readers of *The Shooting Times* own or have a part interest in a trout water. They know only too well that pike can reduce the quality of the trout fishing and they wage war against them.

All too often this war is conducted on 14th-century principles and the army retires from the field in October, makes a local sally or two on fine days during the winter, and starts thinking that it might be a good idea to have a real go at the enemy when spring invigorates its corporate system. But by that time the poet's "lightly turn to thoughts of love" theme comes into active operation. The love is red spotted, sex is immaterial, and "those whom we love we destroy"—always provided they are fools enough to suck in our flies. Once the trout season opens only people with the iron determination and senselessness of unsuccessful dictators can continue to pursue pike when trout are present for the catching.

This high-flown homily comes a bit late, for the changeover is already upon us, but it was inspired by my study of the recently published annual report of The Avon and Dorset River Board for the year ended March 31, 1957.

This report contains a great deal of information of value to the many game and coarse fishermen who visit or are fortunate enough to live beside the Hampshire Avon, the Dorset Stour, and other smaller but equally famous rivers under the Board's authority. Included in it is an account of how sustained attacks on pike in two lengthy stretches of trout water over a period of four years have resulted in a demonstrable improvement in the quality of the trout fishing.

Pike seem to do a useful job of work in many coarse fishing waters, for where you find your 20lb. pike you find proportionately large barbel, bream, chub, dace and the rest—but generally speaking they have no place in the trout stream. Hook-kyped cannibal trout will do all that is necessary in preventing too big a population of small brownies.

The Board is satisfied that electrical apparatus is more effective for pike than nets. It reaches this conclusion by comparing the results of its own heavy netting programme and the much slighter "fishing" done by two angling organisations using electrical methods.

Sea Law

Representatives of 76 countries gathered in Geneva at the end of last month for a United Nations conference that still goes on.

They are trying to work out some international agreement on the use of the seas and on the limitation of territorial water that will suit everybody, and the task is a formidable one.

Claims to under-sea oil and mineral deposits have complicated a matter that was complicated enough without them when the last conference met in 1930.

Crabs and Economics

The luscious-looking red crab decorated with bits of multi-coloured vegetables on a dish in a restaurant has little apparent connection with dry-as-dust cost of living, average weekly earnings or similar statistics—but the two are, unfortunately, intimately connected.

Chance and interest has given me more than average experience of crab-potters. I have known many between Dover and Dingle, and gone out on countless occasions with those of the Isle of Wight, the Devon coast and the Bantry Bay area.

In pre-war days, when I lived on an island in Bantry Bay, a lobster (to change the subject temporarily) cost me a shilling—a high price when the large average crab cost 2d. and a really outsize specimen 3d. The reason, as always, was supply and demand. There was very little market for crabs in that remote area, but the lobsters were kept alive in big floating crates, and at regular intervals a French vessel came along to collect them at a bob-a-nob—sound economics and a good price in those days.

Why the lobster is so much more in demand than the crab I do not understand, for with a great deal of experience and a considerable consumption of both I still prefer crab to lobster. Unfortunately my personal taste has no effect on world demands and the fact remains that lobster is more popular than crab.

Don't think you can buy a crab or a crab meal cheaply, of course. That is the sellers' end of the market. You may be lucky and see crabs on a stall with prices chalked on their shells; if they are unpriced you pay whatever the stallholder thinks you are good for after looking at your shoes, suit and hat.

There is little in all this juggle of figures for the man who buys or makes his crab pots, sets them, gathers them and sells his catch. Unless he is content with an odd setting when his time, the tide and the weather suit, he cannot take up any regular employment ashore. If he wants to fish two tides a day it is a full time job and he must employ a mate if only for actual trips to and from the pots. Costs of pots or the materials for making them have gone up some 800 per cent since 1938.

In spite of all this, of course, the crabber carries on, picking up a living with outside jobs. He will go on like this until he dies, but the point is that no one will succeed him. Crabbers are now elderly or old men and their sons are earning good money on shore. There is no labour-saving method of catching crabs, and nuclear physics don't help a bit. Crabs have got to be caught by lengthy and tedious methods and those of us who like crabs (not out of a tin) will have to pay through the nose for them in the next generation.

Fly Anglers v. The Others

I know there is a gulf between fly fishing and bottom fishing (to give bait methods their old name) but I also know the gulf is narrowing to a mere crevasse bridgeable by any snocat.

It is still possible to meet some men who despise and condemn any sort of angling other than dry fly, but these are snobbish poseurs and usually, I imagine, quite indifferent performers. I can assure you they exist, for I know two and have met several more. They must not be confused, of course, with the large body of fishermen who from personal choice never fish with anything but a dry fly. These follow their own desires but they neither despise nor condemn the sport of others.

I have always thought that no conscious diversion of any sort existed until well on into the second half of the eighties, for the angling writer of the day, when writing of trout fishing went gaily on from fly to worm and back again, recommending one for this condition and another for that. I was wrong.

It is often the diarist who provides the little bits of information that are omitted from the big factual volumes. So it is here. I am reading, for the first time, the account written by the Hon. John Byng of his various tours of the country between 1781-1794, published as "The Torrington Diaries" (Eyre and Spottiswoode: 1938).

In September 1794 he wrote: "Fly fishing when rapid and productive, must be very gratifying, else your ground fishing in a good perch hole is a calmer and easy diversion: Fly fishers are the fox hunters who overrate their own performances, and undervalue the simple, and more certain pastime of the (beagling) ground anglers."

I find that brief statement extremely interesting. It shows that some fly fishermen already adopted an air of superiority and a member of the aristocracy preferred perch fishing.

Fishing "Temples"

A few days after making that entry John Byng stole off from the elegant company he so much detested and spent two days perch fishing at Chicksands (Bedfordshire). "Many and good perch did I take in this meandering stream; never was my float idle and notably did they pull: . . . In the two days I caught 50 brace of perch, none of them small and some of good size."

At Chicksands he found and sketched a "fishing house," as he described it. Walton and Cotton's "fishing temple" (as it is rather foolishly called) on the Dove is well known. A dozen years ago a replica of it, still repairable but in disrepair, stood where the main road crosses the Derbyshire Derwent at Cromford. From the diarist's sketch the Bedfordshire building seems to be another copy of the original. I wonder if it still stands.

Tail Piece

One goon: "That's a big bucket of bait for a day's fishing."
Another goon: "I get hungry too, you know."—The Goon Show.

CORIDON.

Is There a New Factor in Dee Angling?

by Doric

THROUGH the dreaming millenia since the mighty ice crashed and slithered and disappeared from the lands of Europe, Time to the salmon has stood still. The ways of the salmon today are the ways of its kind of a thousand thousand generations gone. And this timeless pattern of behaviour, governed by little that has happened in the individual past, forever unaffected by events in the future, and conditioned by the eternal "now," we call by the name of "instinct."

How, then, account for what appears to be a sudden alteration in the expected "instinctive" behaviour of salmon in the Aberdeenshire Dee during the past two or three years?

When the 1957 season opened on February 1, sport on the lower reaches (20 miles inland) was good, and on middle beats (25-30 miles inland) it was relatively excellent. Clean fish were caught fifty miles from the sea in the opening weeks.

Fish had obviously entered the river in the closing weeks of 1956 and very early in 1957, profited by the high, warm winter waters and made excellent time upstream by February 1.

Speaking theoretically but rationally, salmon behave rather correctly in their spawning rivers. The forerunners travel as far up as conditions are encouraging, then tend to stop in that spot, perhaps for many weeks or months. Following and subsequent groups, unless restricted by some unhappy circumstances, will tend to catch up with the earlier runners, and if the situation warrants, will probably leap-frog the vanguard (or take it with them) into a still higher region.

The very large number of salmon in middle Dee beats this February strongly indicated that later running fish would strive to reach that area, and settle there, without stopping overlong, if at all, in the lower reaches.

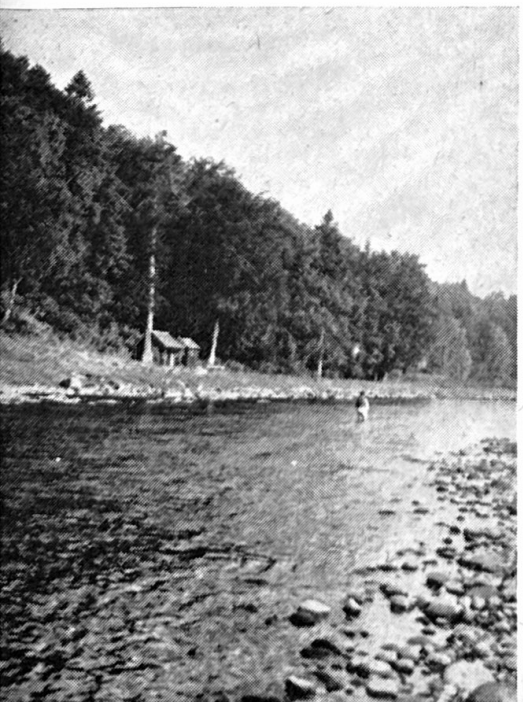
What really happened was that after initial good fishing in the centre river, catches there quickly diminished while returns rose and stayed very high in the seaward twenty miles. In other words, the February-March salmon—and April-May, too—elected not to push on to join their fellows 25-30 miles up, which would have been a normal and instinctive pattern of behaviour, but preferred to remain in an area when no river conditions or weather charts could justify such an act.

A Tendency to Linger

For the past few years the salmon have tended to linger at and below Banchory (18 miles inland), in spite of frequently attractive running conditions. Their arrival above this point, and behaviour when they do so, are erratic and disappointing. *Salmo Salaris*—The Leaper—has even grown somewhat disinclined to jump, for several miles above the village.

Something appears to have upset the purely reflexive behaviour of the salmon in these recent years, and it is very hard to ascribe this to any river state or weather cycle. In fact, conditions as they actually occurred ought to have encouraged the fish to seek middle and upper beats early in the season, instead of waiting, as they apparently do for no visible reason in the tail-end of the river till about mid-May, then "exodus" *en masse*.

Mill pool, Mid-Dee.



The ensuing calvacade travels on through middle and upper beats, ignores all manner of fishermen other than briefly, and having distributed itself thoroughly and vaguely over Deeside and its tributaries, effectively disappears.

What holds these fish in the seaward eighteen miles of Dee in spite of often genial weather and water conditions, until relatively late in the season when some mysterious factor reaches flash-point, and sends them up and up the stream like scalded cats in this mysterious 48-hour evacuation?

Potarch bridge—once gateway to Dee's finest stretches.

The word "pollution" is synonymous with injury and threat to fish life, visible and perhaps lethal, but a different degree of "pollution" could exist whose effect would be to induce a sexual—or psychological—modification in a migratory fish like the salmon.

In recent years, Banchory has grown considerably and the amount of sewage, spilled straight into the Dee without benefit of filters, has increased greatly in volume; but with a new factor added—the increasing percentage, volume apart, of the detergent in the spill.

Salmon and Sewage

That this sewage has little or no harmful effect on the fish is accepted—they appear to thrive happily in the midst of it!—but it does not follow that invisible effects also are non-existent.

It would take a highly-skilled analyst-biologist to decide this conjecture, but it is a reasonable assumption that if the detergent volume-ratio equals "X" in a river, its complicated and destructive chemistry may induce positive sexual changes in *migratory* fish, and inhibit their natural tendency to spread over a whole river, instead of huddling in one quarter of it.

(Prior to February, 1957, large, warm winter rivers would reduce the detergent volume-ratio to "X Minus" and allow the salmon to run naturally. This would account for the large number that actually did swim beyond Banchory before the season opened).

Salmon do not use a calendar to time the highlights of their sojourn in their river. Water temperatures and oxygenation play a notable part, and it will be agreed that when the former is high and the latter low (high summer) the reflexes built into the spawning vehicle that is a salmon operate to "pot" the fish in some convenient hole. Only the frosts of autumn, when the leaves are twirling along on the ripples of a chilling river, will release the dreaming creature to its active destiny.

Suppose the chemistry of a sewage outflow not only affected the oxygenation of a river, but also, as drugs will to humans, in some way atrophied—or stimulated!—the sexual impulses of the fish. Suppose, in a medium carrying a critical amount of detergent (or resultant drug) the fish suspected its spawning was imminent—or utterly remote—it would, being subject to uncompromising reflexes, simply stand still, in space and time.

Were its sexual development to be stifled, there would be no possible urge to impel it up any river! Were its pro-creative timetable stimulated, it would again tend to stay where it found itself after its first burst up from the seas; and feel bewildered by such sex-impressions superimposed on what it would sense to be an incongruous environment.

Swimming eighteen miles against a gradually increasing and strengthening tide of chemicals may cause the salmon to slow down in perplexity and stop anywhere along the distance.

As soon as an appreciable group assembles anywhere, most subsequent runners, even if they themselves are less affected (perhaps in a higher river) will, for social reasons, stop alongside. Numerous "static" groups of salmon in the Aberdeen to Banchory area account almost wholly for the excellent sport enjoyed there recently; this fact remains, but what is not yet clear is the part the detergents play in the disposition of the spring fish.

Another thing that is not clear is the point at which the loitering shoals unanimously desert their long-loved abode down-river; could it be when a warming river, and dropping oxygen, send the detergent volume-ratio soaring to "X Plus," and renders unbearable that which had been soporific?

Roughly opposite to the sewage outflows, the clear waters of the Feugh stream enter the Dee, and while it could be coincidental, the fact remains that the fishing immediately below the burn mouth, which used to be very "ordinary," has become extremely good in recent years.

(Continued on page 222, col. 3)

Chokes and Compensators

by Richard Arnold

IT is difficult today to realise that when the choke was introduced to the shotgun public it raised a storm of controversy, and the shooting papers and sporting periodicals of the period, around 1874, were full of arguments for and against the "novelty." Mr. W. W. Greener fought hard, and with success, for this style of gun barrel boring in the United Kingdom, whilst in the United Stakes, Fred Kimball (or Kimble as some spell his name) who claimed to be its inventor, was putting up an equally spirited battle.

Today, of course, the system of boring shotgun barrels with some degree of choke is commonplace, and the principles are fairly well understood by a substantial proportion of shooting men. Putting it briefly, choke may be described as the bore constriction of a shotgun which is located towards and near the muzzle and is the means whereby the charge of shot is concentrated for its flight through the air.

Choke is of course familiar to shooters, not only on account of its use, but because of the stamping of gun barrels with this word under the various Gun Barrel Proof Rules, where a certain degree of constriction existed. Under the Rules of Proof, 1954, which came into operation on February 1, 1955, the word "choke" disappeared from gun barrels. The term originated in the early days of breech loaders when it was found that the firing of solid ball through constricted or choked barrels could end in disaster. As a result, many sportsmen of successive generations have come to rely on the word "choke" to denote a boring throwing a denser shot pattern at given distances: in actual fact, the proof authorities intended the word "choke" to mean "not for ball." Furthermore the word "choke" itself used in connection with proof marks, is meaningless. It does not indicate the degree of constriction even, which could be anything from .004in. to .040 inch. In addition there is a tolerance in gun barrel borings—a standard 12-bore tube is generally reckoned at .729 inches, but it could be as much as .740 or as narrow as .710 and still be a 12-bore.

In a 12-bore gun choke varies from 5 to 40 thousandths of an inch, and where the constriction is less than 5/1000 inch, it is known as improved cylinder. A barrel with less constriction even, would be termed a true cylinder. Before the Rules of Proof, 1954 came into operation, current practice was that barrels with a constriction of more than 8/1000in. *had* to be marked "choke," whereas barrels with 4/1000in. constriction *could* be so stamped.

Old Measurement Methods

The old method of measuring choke mathematically, in the case of a 12-bore, is as under:

True cylinder—0.729 inch (diameter of barrel)

Improved cylinder—0.729 inch contracted to 0.725 inch at muzzle.

Quarter choke—0.729 inch contracted to 0.719 inch at muzzle.

Half choke—0.729 inch contracted to 0.710 inch at muzzle.

Three-quarter choke—0.729 inch contracted to .701 inch at muzzle.

Full choke—0.729 inch contracted to .693 inch at muzzle.

This method of measuring is more or less obsolete, and the following standards, plus or minus 3/1000 of an inch, may be quoted as official for European and American shotgun borings.

	Full choke	Modified choke	cylinder
12 bore	.700in.	.718in.	.729in.
16 bore	.633in.	.651in.	.662in.
20 bore	.586in.	.604in.	.615in.

Yet, here again, these mathematical calculations of choke do not mean a thing, ballistically, to the shotgunner himself. Furthermore, the advent of new type propellents, coupled with the introduction of the star-crimped cartridges, obviating the old rolled-top turnover with overshot wad, has resulted in closer shooting patterns. Gun barrels bored to give, say, a three-quarter choke percentage of shot in the standard 30-inch circle with rolled-top cartridges, often give, with identical loads in a crimped cartridge full-choke patterns. In place, therefore, of a definition of "choke" by reference to the actual constriction of the gun barrel at the muzzle, the sportsman should define the amount of choke in his barrel by reference to the shot charge percentage thrown into the 30-inch circle at the standard distance of 40 yards.

Using this method of definition we find that true cyclinder would be a tube throwing 40 per cent of its pattern into the test circle, whilst improved cylinder should throw 50 per cent. Other constrictions would be rated as, quarter choke—55 per cent, half-choke—60 per cent, three-quarter choke—65 per cent, and full choke—70 per cent. Ascertaining the amount of choke in a gun muzzle as a result of these tests, the shooter has a solid basis on which to consider the exterior ballistics of his weapon and cartridge.

Other Factors

But other factors enter into the scene. A gun barrel will throw a different percentage of shot into the 30-inch circle at a given distance having regard to either the powder-charge and shot load used, and also the size of the shot. A given choke boring may deliver 50 per cent of the shot charge into the 30-inch circle at 40 yards, if using, say, No. 5s, but actually increase the percentage if 6s are used, and if a very large size, say BB is used, really "spread" the charge and give only about 22/25 per cent.

The obvious thing, therefore, is for the sportsman to plate and pattern his weapon with various shot charges and pellet sizes, to get the maximum results for both pattern and penetration and ignore the word "choke" on his gun barrel.

Choke boring brings with it great problems. For shooting at short ranges, a tightly constricted choke, or one which throws a dense shot pattern, is not required because either game is missed entirely, owing to the small shot spread, or, if hit, smashed into a bloody pulp. For shooting at long ranges, open patterns from open boring wound rather than kill. To try to reach a happy medium, most double guns for general shooting are built improved-cylinder in the right barrel and a degree of choke in the left; wildfowl guns are generally, mistakenly, built full choke in both barrels. But this is a question of compromise and not altogether a very happy solution.

The conventional double gun, built with two degrees of choke will, in all probability give the following performance. From the right, improved cylinder barrel, with standard rolled-top cartridges and a given load and size of shot, place 50 per cent of the shot charge in the 30-inch circle, yet with a change in shot size or with the utilisation of a crimped cartridge the pattern may be improved up to 55 or even 60 per cent, thus giving a half-choked performance! The choke barrel, on the other hand, may shoot 60 to 70 per cent with the standard cartridge and actually improve on it to 80 per cent with a crimped cartridge, giving a very tight pattern. Again, however, if larger pellets are used, a dispersing effect may be apparent and the shot thrown into the 30-inch circle may be as low as 40 per cent. Too much choke, in any event, has a dispersing effect on shot charges.

Too Much Choke

The sportsman should, therefore, concentrate on the killing pattern he requires at the ranges at which he will shoot, and the ideal would be a gun which would put that percentage of pellets from the load in the 30 inch circle at all distances from 15 to 50 yards! With a muzzle loader it is possible, from a true cylinder barrel to do this, by careful loading, but the standard double gun with its fixed choke boring is limited, and the shooter has to adjust himself to the weapon and its peculiarities. Indeed, too many shooters use chokes which are too tight for them and would perform far better with more open borings.

The gun may be built with a system of interchangeable barrels of different borings, so that the sportsman may have several guns in one, using the same action and stock, and thereby be able to indulge in driven game shooting or trap shooting at will. But a set of interchangeable barrels is expensive, and there is bulk to consider when travelling.

Today the American sportsman, the European sportsman, and the Commonwealth sportsman, are acutely aware of the advantage of using a choke device which may be attached or removed from the muzzle of the gun at will, though only single barrel weapons, single loaders or repeaters can utilise this device. Known as detachable chokes, and built in either separate tubes or incorporating a variable device, they have revolutionised the whole shotgun picture of patterning of shot A fixed choke, on even the most expensive shotgun ever built, can, by its very nature, only pattern perfectly at one distance. By using detachable chokes, the shotgunner can always have the weapon balanced for the right pattern for range and game with the proper load. Furthermore, by using a single-barrel, the sportsman has found that aiming has become more accurate. There are in America today at least 10 manufacturers of choke tubes and similar devices, whilst on the continent of Europe, in Australia and New Zealand they are in steady production: there is even a British model manufactured at Redditch.

Before discussing, however, the merits and demerits and types of these detachable choke devices, and their ballistical properties and methods of attachment to weapons, it should be pointed out that choice of ammunition and load is of paramount importance. With a conventional weapon with a fixed boring, the load has to be adjusted to suit that boring, whereas under the circumstances where the choke can be varied, the reverse is true, because the choke is selected to get the right pattern for a given shot size and cartridge load.

If the sportsman who uses a variable choke attachment or choke tube is to obtain the utmost from his weapon, he should forget the terms "choke" "modified" "improved" and so forth, and refer to the settings or tube length as 40 yards, 30 yards, 30 yards, and so on, *in conjunction with a particular shot load.*

CLUBROOM TYPES

by David Stone

IF your temperament is like that of most other shooters, you see next to nothing of what is happening in the clubroom on a match night. On those occasions you are, no doubt, too preoccupied with keeping yourself "Cool, calm and collected" by doing all sorts of things that you would not contemplate doing on a normal night.

On match nights the clubroom has the atmosphere of a dentist's waiting room.

How do you spend those agonising minutes before being called to the firing point?

Are you, I wonder, a "gloomy sitter," or perhaps a "talkative walker"? If you are neither of these you may well be "an odd-job jobber" or an "in and outer" or worse still an "away from it all" type.

If you are entirely oblivious to it all and continue to behave as a rational human being we would most definitely welcome you to our club and offer you the position of vice-captain to our imperturbable captain, William Patt. There is nobody else with the necessary temperament to take over if need be.

Our team has all the types. We have among us, the confirmed "gloomy sitter" who, from the moment we enter the range, whether it be ours or theirs, will find a seat in a remote corner and there he will sit, contemplating something that he finds on the floor, wherever he may be, and he will contemplate it in gloomy, silent, introspection until called upon to shoot.

If I named him, he would no doubt sue me, but we also have a fervent "ammo polisher" who, even if he had to wait an hour or two would spend the time polishing every precious round for every precious minute of it until the brass cases shone like burnished gold, the bullets like silver and the maker's name was obliterated completely.

Our "talkative walker" is a menace in spite of his fairly regular ninety-seven. Once inside a clubroom he can neither remain still nor stop talking. He is practically unbearable and is passed round from member to member like a hot brick, but he has a certain nuisance value which is probably worth a point or two to us. But as a vice-captain? Heaven forbid!

The "odd-job jobber" we must admit, is an asset. Do you have one? He is of course, the chap who must always be doing something, making the tea, putting up the targets, taking them down, writing up the names on the score board, anything at all. He can be a pest when we are visiting, but at home we deliberately cater for him and ensure that there are plenty of jobs for him to do. I well remember one occasion when visiting the Railway Club that he insisted on making the tea and in doing so he so upset the lady whose job it normally was, that she scored a terrible eighty-nine.

Probably the least worry of them all is the "in and outer", and if you are not familiar with him you may get a little worried during the evening, wondering if he will be in or out when he is required to shoot. But you need not be. He is always there at the time. But exactly what he gets up to during those periods when he is out will ever remain a mystery.

Finally, William Patt's biggest headache is indubitably, our "away from it all" type. How do you cope with him?

He is the fellow who just disappears although he will be there all right at the published time for shooting. But then he just disappears. When we are shooting at home the places that he can retire to are somewhat restricted and so we know where to find him. But when we are away there can be complications. For example, when we shoot against H.M.S. Seaspite it is not only problematical whether he will be found at the right time, but whether he will ever be found again! If you take a false step outside their range you could quite easily hurtle over a two hundred foot cliff or be precipitated headlong into a frogman's practice tank or maybe scooped up by a passing helicopter. Our "away from it all" type, has never failed to return yet, but. . . .

The eighth member of our team is much too young to be "typed," but if he does not soon stop his incessant questioning about "Who's in the next detail?" he is certainly going to develop into a type I have not yet listed.

By the way, have you got a piece of rag you could let me have? I've nothing to polish my rounds with.

Olympic Clays

by R. A. Denham

ON January 5 the Bisley Gun Club organised their first post-war 15 trap Olympic clay pigeon shoot. Fifty birds were shot by twenty-four competitors. Scores were good considering the unusual conditions imposed by the 15 trap system. Some lessons were learnt; and these together with notes on the general organisation of this type of event follow.

Traps

a. The Body. The 15 Imperial Chemical Industries "Plus" traps which were kindly lent to us by the manufacturers for the 1956 Olympic trials were used. These are excellent in design, strong and reliable.

b. The Arm. This is not satisfactory. All too often the birds curl or side slip (the Swiss say that they are not fast enough) and too many clays were broken on release. It is said that the "Peacock" arm and the "Plus" trap make an excellent combination throwing birds accurately and at the required speed. We understand that I.C.I. are at present experimenting with a similar type of arm, and we hope that their tests may be effective and quick for it would be a shame if this excellent trap got a bad reputation.

c. Release Mechanisms. These were fixed to the back of the "Plus" traps. They were electrically controlled from the firing point. They seemed to work in a satisfactory manner on this occasion, not one "no bird" being caused by the mechanism, but it remains to be seen if they will last. They are much inferior to the design submitted by another club member, but they are very simple and three times as cheap. Sixteen releases were made by an amateur in a private workshop in about 30 hours.

Birds

The sneaking manner in which some of the Continental birds at Bisley used to disappear into gorse bushes and behind obstructions before the second barrel could be fired was avoided as far as possible, for all birds must present a reasonable target until they are out of range. White clays were used when their path did not rise above the sky line, but this may not be allowed in major competitions.

It is essential that three independent judges should approve the setting of all traps before each day's shooting.

The Control Box

A control panel which governed the 15 traps had been made. This also included "Stop and Start" and "No Bird" buttons, together with a warning light. It was not nearly so convenient as the control mechanism sold in France, but unfortunately this costs about £150.

The order in which traps were released was governed by a card. A method of making up this card, so that in 25 birds no competitor shot from the same trap more than twice, had been devised. Cards were changed with each detail.

Referees

The chief referee was responsible for the conduct of the detail. He signified losses, after noting the decision of the other judges, with a loud toot on a bicycle horn. In this way neither the competitor nor the scorers were in any doubt about the result. Scoring was kills to count.

Two assistant referees were supposed to stand one on each side, a little back from and beyond the ends of the firing point. They were to signify a loss by raising a hand. It was a cold wet day, and volunteers were naturally not over-anxious to freeze, but in big competitions help from members of the retiring squad will be much appreciated.

Scoring

The chief scorer, using the Continental type of scoring sheet made a top and a carbon copy of the results of each detail. The top sheet went to the stats. office, and the carbon copy was cut up and distributed to members of the detail.

Two additional scorers should have sat with the accessory judges recording results upon the Continental type of scoring pads (these are similar to the I.C.I. pads only they have six spaces instead of 5). Cold winds eliminated volunteers for these posts, but again in major competitions three scorers are no luxury. In the 1957 European Championships there were frequent arguments even with four scorers. The Continental system does not have that long delay between each 25 birds as No. 5 shooter moves around to No. 1 stand. It is during this respite that the American trap scorer can re-orientate himself.

Time

An average detail of six shooters took 20 minutes to cover their birds. Thus assuming that there are no technical failures (dangerous) and that shooting starts promptly (unlikely) at 9 a.m. and continues until 6 p.m. (with one hour off for lunch) only 36 shooters will be able to complete a series of 100 birds in that day. In Paris 70 competitors had to work hard to get 200 birds into four days' shooting. If the N.R.A. organises a 100 bird event at Bisley on July 12, members will have to stake their claims well in advance.

Conduct of Shooting

A detail was composed of six shooters, five at the stands and one in reserve. Competitors moved one place to the right after every target, the man in reserve moving to stand 1. If a "No Bird" was declared, the puller notified the trapper by ringing the butts buzzer. When the offending trap had been loaded the trapper pressed his bell push, ringing a bell at the stand. This told the shooter that all was ready for him to call again.

Cartridges

There is no doubt at all amongst those accustomed to shooting abroad that 1¼oz. cartridges must be used. 1 3/16 and 1⅛ ounce loads are useful for age and youth but not in serious competitions. Furthermore candidates who hope to be selected for major events abroad must practise with the same type of ammunition which they expect to use in competitions.

Mr. Huskins from the I.C.I. attended the shoot. He brought with him a new type of Alphamax cartridge which has been produced especially for this type of shooting.

Odin's Bird

by A. L. Evans

RAMPSIDE is a tiny village on the low and sandy shore of Morecambe Bay, where Furness thrusts a green arm towards the breakers of the Irish Sea. Hrofni—a Viking—gave his name to the place. Hrofni, the raven, named after Father Odin's bird.

But ravens are rare visitors to the seashore hereabouts. To see them, one must leave the sea, and travel up into the gaunt Lakeland mountains. I make my annual pilgrimage in January, especially to see the ravens displaying, before they settle down to building a nest and rearing a family. Sometimes, I climb along the broad whale-back of Fairfield, a towering hulk of a mountain rising steeply above gentle Rydal Water. I visit the northern face, where the mountain breaks off abruptly, and sweeps down to a black circlet of water, Grisedale Tarn; a place where, if the legend is to be believed, an Anglo-Saxon king's crown was thrown after the owner had been slain in battle on top of a nearby mountain pass. What a magnificent setting in which to see the king of crows.

I can watch the ravens here as long as the freezing wind, or the grey mist, permits. Down they tumble to the valley, opening sable wings at the last moment to soar skywards again. Rolling over in mid-air, somersaulting down until they seem about to crash on the icy rocks, only to check and wheel upwards in a wide and rapid spiral. But their best performance is shown when one or the other shoots down one of the dark ravines in the riven face of the mountain, the hurtling dark body only a few inches from fang-like rock. When they do this, and disappear into thick mist creeping up out of the valley, it is awe-inspiring, especially when one has a grandstand seat on a field of ice, with only the rattle and swish of wing quills, the deep bark of the birds, and the whisper of wind-blown ice crystals to break the wintry silence of the hills. Comforting indeed is the ice-axe in one's hand.

In the Lake District, the raven has little of the vices of its cousins, the crow and magpie. It is an eater of carrion, and not, as far as I know, a killer of sickly stock. It has no need to attack any sheep. Ranging far and wide, the huge birds go hungry but rarely. Casualties occur periodically amongst the Herdwicks or the Swaledales, the hill sheep best suited to this region. Some get "crag-fast"—stuck on a narrow ledge—and die of exhaustion or starvation if undiscovered by the shepherd. A few slip and fall on to rocks far below, while a few are drowned by a sudden spate while feeding in one of the narrow ghylls. Or else one will get mired in a peat bog and die slowly in the black mud. When this happens, the ominous bird of Odin is usually first on the scene.

Though the raven is a protected bird and breeds when the hills are often locked in snow and ice, its nests are pillaged annually, usually by a competent cragsman who ought to know better. While this continues there is little chance of seeing many ravens in the air together. Unlike the Hebrides, where a hundred have been seen at one roost, or Shetland, where no less than eight hundred gathered a few years ago, to feed on a school of stranded whales. Seen like this, the raven loses its regality and becomes merely a deep-voiced, squabbling crow.

I prefer to see Odin's bird alone or with one other. Singly, silhouetted against the clear sky over the mountains—like the terrible raven woven on the Norsemen's standards, Landeyda, the land ravager. Or as a pair, circling about the south buttress of Great Gable, a rocky tower in the central hills, the mountain revered by the Vikings more than a thousand years ago as the home of their god. When the raven's deep growl echoes over its bald pate, the picture is complete. Father Odin's bird, over Father Odin's mountain.

Sussex is the most heavily wooded county in England, especially the high weald. Here the rabbit problem is particularly acute, both from the farming and re-afforestation point of view, and the destruction of rabbits is particularly difficult. There are several examples in the county of farms which have at least doubled production since the rabbit population decreased following the first outbreak of myxomatosis in 1953. This was stated by Mr. H. J. Gill, County Agricultural Advisory Officer, during a demonstration of methods of rabbit control on the Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan's Birchgrove Estate, Dane Hill, recently.

Watched by farmers, representatives of the County and District Agricultural Executive Committees and the National Farmers' Union, Mr. Macmillan's head-keeper Mr. W. Blake gave a demonstration of the methods used to keep down rabbits on the estate. With the assistance of neighbouring keepers Mr. Blake organised a drive with terriers and guns and the aid of long nets through woodland on Woodgate Farm to account for surface rabbits, then tackled burrows with ferrets. These methods are normally used on the estate. Mr. Blake pointed out that he works in co-operation with his neighbouring keepers in the war against rabbits.

The chairman of East Sussex National Farmers' Union, Mr. F. B. Cornwell of Marshall Farm, Horney Common, Nr. Uckfield, said: "The N.F.U. is quite prepared to co-operate with the rabbit clearance schemes. It is in the farmer's own interest to do so. It is most important that the problem should be tackled before the real breeding season starts."

A photograph of some of the keepers who took part appears on page 194.

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12b. BROWNING 2-shot Automatic	£52. 2.1	127/5
12b. BREDA 5-shot Automatic	£58.16.0	143/9
12b. ITALIAN Folding Hammerless, 30" barrel	£16. 6.8	39/11
12b. B.S.A. Single Barrel	£22. 1.0	53/11
12b. WEBLEY & SCOTT Single Barrel	£20.16.6	50/11
12b. WEBLEY & SCOTT Double Barrel Hammerless, 28" and 30" barrels	£69. 8.4	169/8
.410 D.B. Hammer Gun, 28" barrels	£25. 0.0	61/1
.410 Bolt Action Single Barrel	£10. 8.3	25/5
RIFLES		
.22 TYROL 10-shot	£25. 0.0	61/1
.22 BROWNING 9-shot Automatic	£15.17.4	38/9
.22 BROWNING 11-shot Pump Action	£18.15.0	45/10
.22 BRNO 5-shot Bolt Action	£21.15.0	53/2
.22 KRICO 5-shot Bolt Action	£20. 0.0	48/11
.22 HUSQZARNA 5-shot Mauser	£18. 8.0	45/–
.22 B.S.A. Supersport 5-shot Bolt Action	£14. 0.0	34/3
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.177 B.S.A. Cadet Major	£8.16.6	21/7
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MARTIN-BARR & STROUD. Fitted	£19.10.0	47/8
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OPTIKON 4x. "	£24. 0.0	58/8
REUDIGER 3x. "	£13. 7.0	32/8
WATERPROOF CLOTHING		
ANTARCTEX SHOOTING JACKET from	£11.11.0	28/3
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GUNDOG NEWS

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Beoley Kennels, Redditch, Worcs.

WE were beginning to wonder if it ever ceases to rain in Worcestershire, for in the three months we have been here it must have rained five days out of seven. The ditches are full to overflowing, the heavy soil is waterlogged and many fields which should be good pasture resemble miniature lakes. However, today there is driving wind and snow, which at least make a change, and which the dogs appear to enjoy considerably more than I do.

Out with a pack of springers this morning for exercise, their high spirits were entertaining and invigorating, but each puppy seemed to have but one idea—to suddenly stop questing, dash back to me and jump up, plastering me with slush and mud. The retrievers behaved in a more sober manner, as one expects from them, but their delight was to roll in the snow and then shake it all over me. The retrievers certainly looked cleaner, for it does not matter how clean you think your white dogs are, they always look very "off-white" in the snow.

The wet season and marshiness of my training ground has had some good effects this winter. Three youngsters which were originally chary of wetting their feet now revel in water and make for the nearest pool or deep ditch when let out for exercise. Indeed, we reached the stage here that any dog which wanted exercise would have to face water, or do without. Snipe have frequented my meadow, which if nothing else served the useful purpose of laying scent for the dogs to enjoy. I noticed today that the local partridges were in a covey, whereas for the last three weeks or so they had been paired up. A few duck keep coming into the flight ponds, mallard and teal, and I was disgusted to find that one of the tiny ponds, which I had ignored as an unlikely attraction earlier in the season, is full of preened feathers, showing only too clearly that the duck knew better than I did.

One nearby pond contains the skeleton of a sheep which met an untimely death therein. This still attracts all kinds of vermin, and when the pond was frozen over I was interested to see the tracks of a fox, which had desperately tried to dig through the ice to get at the bones. It had also made quite a meal of some bread and potato scraps which had been thrown into the pond for the duck, but which had become imbedded in the ice. One or two of the more venturesome dogs also did a little "skating" with the same object in view, and received an unexpected wetting in the process. One has to be careful about this sort of thing, for a sudden ducking when the ice gives way might well put a timid youngster off water for life, or at any rate for a considerable time.

Feeding Dogs on Ground Game

A reader, J. Marpole (Cheltenham), asks in a recent issue about the feeding of gundogs upon ground game. At one time boiled rabbit and even hare was considered quite a good menu for dogs—even gundogs—though of course nobody in their right senses would dream of feeding raw "fur." One keeper of my acquaintance regularly boiled up rabbits and grey squirrels, fur and all, and fed these and the gravy mixed with biscuit meal to all his dogs. For all I know he may still do so, and I must admit that his animals always looked well, though inclined to scurfiness. I certainly do not subscribe to the view that such a diet will tend to make a retrieving dog hard-mouthed, or "pussy" (I like that term) for that matter, but as one who wholeheartedly condemns the cooking of meat for dogs, I consider the diet one which should only be used as a very last resort. Nothing will ever convince me that cooked meat is better for dogs than raw, or for that matter anything like as good. I have fed raw meat—knackers' meat—to my dogs for the past ten years or so without any ill effects. Indeed, the health, condition and resistence to disease of my dogs improved one hundred per cent when I changed over to raw meat.

Love of water—a bold leap by a yellow labrador.

Buying Butchers' Meat

People often mention the impossibility of getting good raw meat for their dogs, but few butchers are unable to supply either breast of mutton or sheeps' heads, both of which are excellent food and can safely be fed raw. In the case of mutton, some of the excess fat may have to be trimmed off, and sheeps' heads should be split in two. The latter can be fed with the wool on if you like, and half a sheeps' head will satisfy a dog of labrador size for one day. Fed raw in this way, the mutton bones will all disappear and, of the half-sheep's head, you will only find the jawbone and teeth left in the kennel.

Incidentally, unless you are expert with a meat chopper, I advise asking your butcher to cleave the heads. I have spent hours trying to do so successfully, usually ending up with a cut hand and spattered all over with sheep's brains. The expert butcher manages the job with two or three deft strokes of the chopper, and although I have become fairly adept at cutting and chopping most types of meat and bones, I have never mastered the art of cleaving a sheep's head neatly.

Memorable Moments

The question of how a trained dog will behave when among game but out-of-sight of its handler is often discussed, and the only time when the truth emerges is when somebody happens to witness its behaviour. I make no apologies, therefore, when I once again "lift" a paragraph from *The American Field*. In his excellent article "Memorable Moments," Joe Stetson recently wrote of the National Springer Championship, and deals with this question in relation to a bitch called Gingersnap VII. Sent for a pheasant which was obviously a runner, she took the line and in due course returned with a bird. The judge examined it and adjudged it as unshot, and the bitch was sent out again. Gingersnap went to the fall again, took the same line, disappeared over the brow and brought to hand another bird. Once again the judge found it unshot, and the bitch was cast out, and followed the same procedure of taking the line from the fall and disappearing from view. Another bird delivered and the same judgment, so the bitch was taken up. Now over to Joe Stetson for the details.

"Her pickups had been out of sight of the gallery and judge," he writes, "but two oldtimers, exercising a dog, from a vantage point across the road where the course ended witnessed the entire operation, Queenie had come over the rise and made three successive pickups. While doing so, no less than five birds flushed and each time she hupped until the bird had flown beyond gunshot, and then went about her business of locating a bird. On the last flush she had already picked up a bird (the birds had been rained on the night before and were not flying well) when one flushed and she sat down with the bird in her mouth and waited before making her delivery. Thus had a lady springer demonstrated the manners of a queen, only to lose her crown."

There is training for you, if you like! Tell this story to the average shooting man and he will not believe you—some people will never believe that a spaniel can be steady even when under the feet of its handler, let alone when out-of-sight and amongst game. Certainly to reach this pitch of perfection a dog must be very thoroughly trained and experienced and, I may add, extremely intelligent. This is not an isolated incident, for I have heard many similar accounts of natural steadiness and sagacity on the part of gundogs when working out of sight of their handlers. Indeed, I have witnessed both steadiness and intelligence in dogs belonging to other people when I have been picking-up or shooting. Never, however, anything quite as impressive as the above account.

To get a dog to this pitch of perfection it must have not only very thorough training but,

even more important, practical experience. A good deal of confusion often exists about these terms, and some clarification from the practical trainer's point of view may be of help. One talks, writes and reads about a "trained dog," and most shooters automatically think in terms of a trained and experienced dog which has been to many shoots and is capable of dealing with any of the situations which may arise during a day afield. This is as great a mistake as thinking that a boy or girl, on reaching school leaving age, has completed his or her education. Admittedly, such a youngster will have been educated and will have learned right from wrong and should be able to apply past lessons to the many problems and situations which will arise. But readers know as well as I do that the application of what has been taught is only learned through experience.

Take the case of a young dog which has been given a four to six months' course of training, either by its owner or a professional. Such a dog will have been taught obedience and steadiness, practised in retrieving from land and water, used to the gun and so on. But though it has been through quite a comprehensive course, it cannot and does not know how to deal with all the situations which are likely to arise during a day's shooting. It requires practice and experience of what it has been taught, just the same as the teenager does. Whilst, therefore, it is perfectly legitimate to term such a dog as "trained" (in the same way as you would describe your son or daughter as "educated" upon leaving school), it is entirely wrong to attribute to it the experience which it obviously cannot have had.

Experience Teaches

Experience, as we all know, comes with time and opportunity to practise what we have learned. You can reasonably expect a second or third season dog to be much wiser and more efficient than a first season dog or one straight from the trainer's hands. Unfortunately, however, when reading the term "trained" in an advertisement of a dog, the average man's expectations are aroused. Without much thought or inquiry he buys the dog, and then expresses his disapproval of its performance. In the first place he frequently fails to take into consideration the effect of the change of ownership has on a sensitive dog, and secondly he does not appreciate that his purchase is not old enough to have the experience which he, the owner, automatically associates with the term "trained." It would be helpful to all concerned if advertisers of gundogs would word their advertisements more accurately as, for instance, stating a dog to be "trained but inexperienced" if it has not had at least one season's work in the shooting field.

The late Richard Sharpe held the view, expressed in his book, that the giving of experience to a gundog was the responsibility of the owner himself, unless the dog was left in the trainer's hands with this object in view. It is easy to credit a dog with more reasoning power than it actually possesses, and it is equally easy for the uninitiated to credit a "trained" dog with far more experience than it can possibly have had. It is said that man never ceases to learn, and this is even more true of dogs. Learning by experience is almost the only way that a dog can reach a high pitch of perfection in its work. Limited brain and reasoning power neccessitate an animal such as a dog learning almost everything by the association of ideas and practising what is expected of it. The unhappy situation is that the average professional trainer has too many dogs on hand to be able to give them all the experience he would like, and the average owner will not pay for an extended course. The owner trainer is, in most cases, handicapped by lack of time and facilities for experiencing his dog to a high degree.

☆ ☆ ☆

Clay Pigeon Shooting

The Annual General Meeting of the C.P.S.A. will be held on March 21 at the Grosvenor Hotel at 2.30 p.m.

Fixture List

Mar. 15: Leicester and District G.C. Open 100 bird Down-the-Line, 1 p.m.
Mar. 20: Gamekeepers' Annual Shoot, Taverham, Norwich, organised by C. S. Rosson & Co.
Mar. 21: Annual General Meeting of the C.P.S.A., Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria, London, S.W.1, 3.30 p.m.
Mar. 22: Bowland & District G.C., Sawley, near Clitheroe, Lancs. Open Shoot.
Mar. 22: West Sussex G.C. South-East of England Sporting Championship, Cocking, 12 noon.
Mar. 23: Reigate and District C.P.S.C. Club Shoot, Clay Hall Farm.
Mar. 27: Gamekeepers' Annual Shoot, Madingley, Cambridge, organised by Gallyon & Sons Ltd.
Mar. 29: North Wales G.C., Rhosesmor. 100-bird Continental Ball Trap Shoot, 11 a.m.
Mar. 29: Bedford G.C. Practice.
Mar. 30: Beverley & District G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot, 1.30 p.m.

* * *

Reports and Results

The **Reigate and District Clay Pigeon Shooting Club** held its opening shoot on Sunday, February 23, at Clay Hall Farm and 25 guns enjoyed an excellent day's shooting in perfect weather. We also welcomed two shooting wives, Mrs. Holmwood and Mrs. Jill Partridge just back from her honeymoon when she and Mr. Derek Partridge shot 350 pigeon.

Mr. and Mrs. Partridge with some of the 350 pigeon which they shot while on honeymoon.

Results: Down-the line, 1, B. T. Read; 2, R. Ward. Swannack Cup, 1, G. H. Read, 2, C. Read. Double Rise, 1, D. C. Partridge after a shoot-off with G. H. Read (2). Skeet, Round 1, 1, W. Lees; 2, C. Read. Round 2, Class A, B. T. Read; Class B, R. Ward, after a shoot-off with D. C. Partridge. Morning Pool Shoot, C. Read. Afternoon Pool, B. T. Read with a record 20 straight.

For details of our next shoot, Sunday, March 23, write to R. E. Wilson, 90 London Road, Redhill.

* * *

The **Bedford Gun Club** has held its annual general meeting for 1958 and elected the officers listed below. The Club wishes all guns good shooting for the coming season. Another new Down-the-Line layout is being put down and more D.T.L. shooting will be in the programme this year. Twenty-bore and .410 events will be held alternatively at each open skeet shoot again. Fixture lists will soon be sent out. President, Sir Ronald Stewart, Bt.; vice-president, A. Stokes; chairman, R. D. Purcell; vice-chairman, E. T. Peacock; hon. armourer, C. A. Swales; secretary and treasurer, H. C. Hill, 8 Flitwick Road, Ampthill. General Committee: Messrs. R. D. Peppiatt, F. Watson, D. Pratt, F. Stoodley, W. J. Burton, D. Allingham, H. Ball, A. S. Manyweathers and G. L. Reynolds. We open with a practice shoot on March 29.

* * *

North Wales Gun Club Continental Ball Trap System 500 up and one Shoot to go. 25 guns for 100 C.B.T. and 18 guns for 50 Bird D.T.L. On February 22 for the fifth of the series of the 600 Continental B.T.S. shoot, snow fell steadily for the first 50 and fog for the second 50, making shooting rather tough. The general standard has declined still further, no 25 straights; one 24; three 23. Two colts were in the first four places, with two top-class veterans. W. Heald and A. G. Jones 1st equal. J. Wheater and J. Stewart 3rd equal.

If the turn-up continues to show the same keen interest, there will be two classes formed for the next shoot—77 and over for Class A, those without an average in C.B.T.S. will automatically go to A Class for the first 300 targets.

Order of Merit

Saturday, February 22, 1958

1 (equal), W. Heald, 86x100, and A. G. Jones; 3 (equal), J. Stewart, 83, and J. Wheater; 5, G. Jones, 79; 6 (equal), E. Fear, 78, and J. R. Braithwaite; 8 (equal), V. B. Huthart, 76, and J. Peters; 10, P. Rodgers, 74; 11, D. M. R. Jones, 72; 12 (equal), B. Bailey, 71, and T. E. Sanders; 14, D. T. Jones, 70; 15, A. Pratt, 68; 16, D. Cordingley, 63; 17 (equal), F. Sherlock, 62, M. Fleetwood, and D. Finer; 20, D. Kippax, 59; 21, R. Love, 58; 22, R. J. Padfield, 53; 23, T. Beavers, 41; 24, S. Wilson, 39; 25, J. Ikin, 31.

Position in Series: G. Jones, 418x500; B. Bailey, 409; W. Heald, 408; J. Stewart, 406; J. R. Braithwaite, 403; J. Peters, 370; D. T. Jones, 354.

50 Bird D.T.L. Class A: V. B. Huthart, 144 pts. ex 150; G. Jones, 143; J. R. Braithwaite, 137; W. Heald, 134; J. Stewart, 125; J. Pratt, 125; A. E. Lloyd, 120; D. Kippax, 110; D. Finer, 110.

Class B: E. Jackson, 108 ex 150; E. Povey, 105; W. W. Evans, 101; R. J. Edwards, 100; L. Carter, 98; E. Johnson, 98; J. Williams, 89; C. Pendleton, 81; D. Hay, 76; T. Jackson, 65; A. Pemberton, 65.

Is there a New Factor in Dee Angling?

(Continued from page 217)

This could be accounted for by a river alteration (which is unlikely), and it also could be ascribed to the clean waters of a hill stream shouldering out of the way the man-made filth spilling from the opposite bank of the river.

This strange and recent behaviour of salmon must have a cause, and it is difficult to describe river and weather states over the years in question as other than ordinary and largely good; these can hardly be held responsible.

It cannot, as some aver, be a "change in the habits of the salmon." These little units of a constant life-form cannot, in a few short years, discountenance the reflexes attained through a mist of centuries; nature's blueprints can be revised only slightly every so many thousand years.

Something alien affects the Dee salmon, and it is not the winds of heaven nor the sweet waters of the upper river — these are as in the beginning — but it could be a new and potent factor, gushing from every house in Banchory . . .

Only when the spring swells gently into the summer and the shrinking waters warm in the lengthening day, and the "X" factor of Lower Deeside has become unbearable, do the idling, puzzled shoals stir and swim away . . . to purity and peace in the shadow of the hills that lean against the sunset — where they take prodigiously.

No Gossamer Web

by J. D. Clewes

I WONDER how many pairs of eyes besides my own have lingered over those illustrations of shooting wear, the jacket for wildfowling designed by a wildfowler, and so on. Cost a bit, don't they ?

Only for so long can one continue to relegate sports coats and windcheaters to going out with the gun. Eventually there comes a time when there are no more coats. And what then ?

I stood there that rainy windblown afternoon, absently wiping water from the end of my nose on a sodden sleeve, thinking there must be a better way to live. The last of a long line of coats clung limply where it did not flap frenetically. Absolutely ripped to hell, my dear—simply *shredded!*

What was needed was something completely thornproof, warm and if possible water-shedding. I had just swung my legs one at a time over a barbed wire fence. The top strand had been set a mite high — about chest high on a spavined dwarf—and I am sure you follow me. So my old wartime pack now used as a game bag still lay on top of the wire. I stared at it dismally, and then a thought wriggled somewhere inside my little soaking pointed head.

Army webbing ! Now why had I not thought of it before ? I mean to say, I had been carting the stuff around for almost twenty years.

Back home I began cutting the tabs and buckles off, slitting the side seams, and opening it out. Well, well—what do you know ? It produced one piece 13½ inches wide by 42 inches long. There were two inserted side gussets measuring 5 inches by 17, and a number of tabs and brass buckles left over that could doubtless come in handy for something or other. Dior was dead wasn't he ; this was my big chance at — purse your lips — *couture.* I began designing.

It was one of those curious emporiums where everything is worth double, but costs only half the price. Yet they remain in business. Ah yes, here they were, Army packs with two straps inside—not the right ones, but who cares—at 8s. 11d.

" Six please."

The assistant nearly swallowed his Adam's apple. " For the kiddies ? " he said, watching me carefully from the corner of one eye.

" Scouts," I told him, trying to look both prim and slightly you-know like some character out of a Sunday newspaper. I got it right or maybe it is natural. He seemed satisfied anyway. I did not want to give the game away, you see ; let them find out in their own sweet time.

What A Bargain

Back home once more I found that for 53s. 6d. I had acquired not only enough for a coat, but four rifle or gun slings, two cartridge belts, and enough tabs, buckles and straps to equip a Landrover that needed a new canvas. All I needed was a Landrover that needed a new canvas and I was in business already.

Unless you are inordinately tall or one of the Michelin type, it works out like this. Four of the large panels provide back and front with gussets let in for underarm freedom, and two large pockets as well. Sleeves are made from the remaining two large panels. A high neck collar can be made from two of the side gussets, and still you are left with some over, apart from the tabs, straps, buckles and so on.

As a *memoria technica* for the little woman or strapping wench to whom you entrust such favours, I would mention — deferentially of course—that waxed button thread is the stuff. This is no gossamer web. The collar, I think, would best be made single thickness. There are selvedge edges to make a neat front and the other edges lend themselves to straight cotton bind. It seems there is dressing in the stuff, and you may find it kinder on your fingers to wash it first and dry well away from a fire. In this way all the harshness disappears—simply melts away.

See how I lull her into the compliant mood ? I tell you if I didn't know how, my workrooms would be empty of girls inside a week. One either has the knack . . .

An open-ended, locking zip in heavy duty grade costs only 4s. 6d. And a lining of some warm tweedy stuff—not too heavy—for about £1 completes that essential air of mudland madness you so much wish to create. This garment bearing the world-renowned " Clew-

This model is 32 inches from neck to hem. Below, some of the leftovers.

craft " label can be proofed or not as you wish. It comes in a choice of colours: Ditch Drab—Ooze—Clayblue—or Sifted Sand. Wildly in tune with the present mood.

Tabs, buckles, and straps, anybody ? Genuine solid brass. Due to colossal Government purchase only one and six a set—plus postage (5s.). A thousand and one uses. Definitely worth double.

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland : Hon. Secretary, Lt.-Commdr. J. W. Anderton, R.N.V.R., 19 Castle Street, Liverpool, 2.

CLUB REPORTS

Seventy members of the Kent Wildfowlers' Association came to the Fox and Goose, Bapchild, on February 28 to watch the I.C.I. film " More Pheasants," which was found to be most amusing and highly instructive.

After the film show, a raffle produced over £3 for Club funds.

* * *

From the North Lincolnshire Wildfowlers' Club. Whilst shooting on our organised pigeon shoots on the Earl of Yarborough's estate, namely Pelhams Pillar Woods in this case, one of our members, Mr. Bobbie Andrews, lost his gold hunter—a most prized possession won in the days of his youth for a terrific performance in cycle racing.

This happened on February 15 last. On March 1, members made their way to the same wood, and Mr. Bill Thomas took his stand to wait on the woodies. Taking a flying bird late in the afternoon, he noted where it fell, and marching through the bramble and bracken, he stooped to gather the bird, and was most amazed to find underneath *one gold hunter.*

A Mixture for Game

by Taproot

AMID generally rising costs it is encouraging to find that in one important category farmers are to pay much less for the raw materials of their business than they did in 1957. Seed prices of grasses, clovers, the forage crops and most vegetables are down—right down. Messrs. Carter's new catalogue lists marrow-stem and thousand head kale at 4s. 9d. lb. and there are big decreases in grass seeds including the Aberystwyth strains.

Over the past few years kale seed has shown greater fluctuations in cost than any other similar commodity. For a decade it was steady at half a crown a pound, rising to 3s. and 4s. in the early 1950s. Then the cold weather in 1955 damaged crops intended for harvesting and prices began to climb. Further severe weather in January 1956—part of a vintage wildfowling season—left every kale field in the British Isles scorched and blackened. A few pieces recovered sufficiently to be run on for seed and first-grade samples later retailed at 12s. 6d. lb.

In passing, I may mention that my only personal incursion into the seed trade concerned six acres of marrow-stem that came through that bitter January in apparently fair condition and proved surplus to my feeding requirements. It was not a particularly clean crop but to my surprise weeds never at any time threatened trouble. No doubt the well-rooted rows effectually squeezed out most of the upstart competition and the shade of the tall stems did the rest. The snag—and there *was* a snag—came from a totally unexpected development. As spring advanced the delayed effects of frost damage began to show in many plants which then began to throw out fresh growth from ground level.

Soon I had two kale crops on my hands—a 1955 sowing that burst into a mass of brimstone flower and attracted every bee in the parish, and a new season's plant as lush and green as the dairy farmer could wish for. As Mr. Robertson Hare might have said, " Oh calamity."

Desperate measures were called for and when in July the seed-pods were purpling in the orthodox way I cut the whole lot with my binder, stooked it in sixes and hoped for some sun. A fortnight later the whole lot went through the combine to yield a damp but otherwise respectable sample. This was carefully dried over a farm sack drier and eventually I got 6s. lb. for it. As regards profit I broke about all square.

This same summer of '56 gave difficult conditions for harvesting grass and clover seeds with resultant high prices last season.

While on the subject of seed, I should like to mention the " game birds " mixture offered by Messrs. Miln of Chester. This rather complex blending of eight different types of plant is a great advance from the long-established, oversimplified dodge of planting buckwheat in clearings and odd corners.

Messrs. Miln's prescription is as follows : 3lb. sunflower, 3lb. maize, 5lb. canary seed, 5lb. buckwheat, 1lb. caraway, 2lb. sweet clover, 1lb. rape, 1lb. M.S. kale, 21lb. per acre.

The 1957 price of 51s. 3d. an acre is likely to be considerably reduced this year. The combination of cover—supplied by the rape and kale—with the " staggered " ripening of the cereals has held birds continuously from September to the present time on several estates near here where trial strips were planted last summer.

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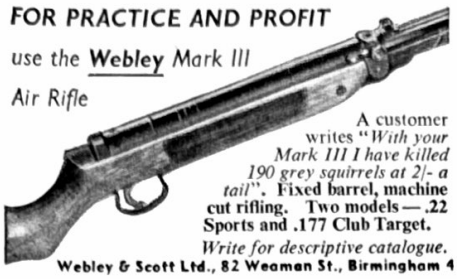

A customer writes "*With your Mark III I have killed 190 grey squirrels at 2/- a tail*". **Fixed barrel, machine cut rifling. Two models — .22 Sports and .177 Club Target.**

Write for descriptive catalogue.

Webley & Scott Ltd., 82 Weaman St., Birmingham 4

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CLAY TARGETS, £5/5/0 per cylinder of 770 ex works, plus cylinder deposit of £2.—The Gun Club, Limited, Gun Club Works, Crayford, Kent.

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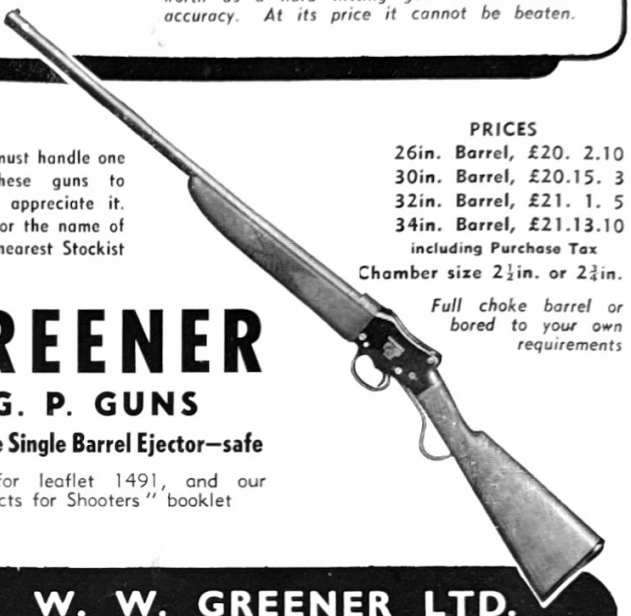

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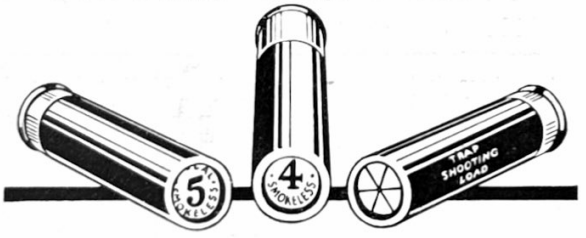

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